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PROBLEMS OF NABOKOV'S POETICS

A Narratological Analysis

Pekka Tammi

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VLADIMIR NABOKOV: A CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR NARRATIVE TEXTS

Novels

	Russian		English	
(1)	1926	*Mashen'ka*	1970	*Mary*
(2)	1928	*Korol', dama, valet*	1968	*King, Queen, Knave*
(3)	1929–30	*Zashchita Luzhina*	1964	*The Defense*
(4)	1930	*Sogljadataj*	1965	*The Eye*
(5)	1931–2	*Podvig*	1971	*Glory*
(6)	1932–3	*Kamera obskura*	1938, 1961	*Laughter in the Dark*
(7)	1934	*Otchajanie*	1937, 1965–6	*Despair*
(8)	1935–6	*Priglashenie na kazn'*	1959	*Invitation to a Beheading*
(9)	1937–8, 1952	*Dar*	1963	*The Gift*
(10)			1941	*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*
(11)			1947	*Bend Sinister*
(12)	1967	*Lolita*	1955	*Lolita*
(13)			1953–5, 1957	*Pnin*
(14)			1962	*Pale Fire*
(15)			1969	*Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*
(16)			1972	*Transparent Things*
(17)			1974	*Look at the Harlequins!*

Short Stories

	Russian		English	
(1)	1924	*"Kartofel'nyj El'f"*	1973	"The Potato Elf"
(2)	1924	*"Sluchajnost' "*	1975	"A Matter of Chance"
(3)	1924	*"Katastrofa"*	1976	"Details of a Sunset"
(4)	1924	*"Groza"*	1976	"The Thunderstorm"
(5)	1924	*"Bakhman"*	1975	"Bachmann"
(6)	1925	*"Rozhdestvo"*	1976	"Christmas"
(7)	1925	*"Pis'mo v Rossiju"*	1976	"A Letter That Never Reached Russia"
(8)	1925	*"Vozvrashchenie Chorba"*	1976	"The Return of Chorb"
(9)	1925	*"Putevoditel' po Berlinu"*	1976	"A Guide to Berlin"
(10)	1926	*"Skazka"*	1975	"A Nursery Tale"
(11)	1927	*"Passazhir"*	1976	"The Passenger"
(12)	1927	*"Uzhas"*	1975	"Terror"
(13)	1927	*"Zvonok"*	1976	"The Doorbell"
(14)	1927	*"Podlec"*	1966	"An Affair of Honor"
(15)	1930	*"Pil'gram"*	1941	"The Aurelian"
(16)	1931	*"Obida"*	1976	"A Bad Day"

(17)	1931	*"Zanjatoj chelovek"*	1976	"A Busy Man"
(18)	1931	"Terra incognita"	1963	*"Terra Incognita"*
(19)	1932	*"Vstrecha"*	1976	"The Reunion"
(20)	1932	*"Lebeda"*	1976	"Orache"
(21)	1932	*"Muzyka"*	1975	"Music"
(22)	1932	*"Sovershenstvo"*	1975	"Perfection"
(23)	1933	*"Admiraltejskaja igla"*	1975	"The Admiralty Spire"
(24)	1933	*"Korolek"*	1973	"The Leonardo"
(25)	1934	*"Krug"*	1973	"The Circle"
(26)	1934	*"Opoveshchenie"*	1973	"Breaking the News"
(27)	1934	*"Krasavica"*	1973	"A Russian Beauty"
(28)	1934	*"Pamjati L.I. Shigaeva"*	1975	"In Memory of L.I. Shigaev"
(29)	1934	*"Khvat"*	1971	"A Dashing Fellow"
(30)	1935	*"Tjazhelyj dym"*	1973	"Torpid Smoke"
(31)	1935	*"Nabor"*	1975	"Recruiting"
(32)	1935	*"Sluchaj iz zhizni"*	1976	"A Slice of Life"
(33)	1936	*"Vesna v Fial'te"*	1947	"Spring in Fialta"
(34)	1937	*"Oblako, ozero, bashnja"*	1941	"Cloud, Castle, Lake"
(35)	1938	*"Iztreblenie tiranov"*	1975	"Tyrants Destroyed"
(36)	1939	*"Lik"*	1964	"Lik"
(37)	1939	*"Poseshchenie muzeja"*	1963	"The Visit to the Museum"
(38)	1939	*"Vasilij Shishkov"*	1975	"Vasiliy Shishkov"
(39)	1940	"Solus rex"	1973	*"Solus Rex"*
(40)	1942	"Ultima Thule"	1973	*"Ultima Thule"*
(41)			1943	"Mademoiselle O"*
(42)			1943	"The Assistant Producer"
(43)			1943	" 'That in Aleppo Once. . .' "
(44)			1944	"A Forgotten Poet"
(45)			1945	"Time and Ebb"
(46)			1945	"Conversation Piece, 1945"
(47)			1948	"Signs and Symbols"
(48)			1948	"First Love"
(49)			1952	"Lance"
(50)	1956	*"Usta k ustam"***	1971	"Lips to Lips"
(51)			1958	"Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster"
(52)			1959	"The Vane Sisters"

Collections of Short Stories

	Russian		English	
(1)	1930	*Vozvrashchenie Chorba: Rasskazy i stikhi*		
(2)	1938	*Sogljadataj*		
(3)			1947	*Nine Stories*
(4)	1956	*Vesna v Fial'te i drugie rasskazy*		
(5)			1958	*Nabokov's Dozen*
(6)			1966	*Nabokov's Quartet*
(7)			1973	*A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*
(8)			1975	*Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*
(9)			1976	*Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*

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* *"Mademoiselle O"* (MO F). Originally published in French (1936).

** Written in 1931–2. Compare *RB*, 46.

Memoirs

	Russian		English	
(1)			1951	*Conclusive Evidence: A Memoir****
(2)	1954	*Drugie berega*		
(3)			1966	*Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*

*** American edition. Published in England under the title *Speak, Memory: A Memoir* (1951).

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND SYMBOLS

In transliterating Russian, I have used a modified version of the system recommended by ISO (Recommendation R9 of September 1968). This will mean that all diacritics are omitted in my own text (ž becomes *zh*), while й is transliterated as *j* and ы as *y*. As for quotations from Nabokov's texts, here a variety of alternate systems may be used. So for example a term like *Sogljadataj* (the original title of *E* R) occurs as *Soglyadatay* in the author's Foreword to *The Eye* (*E*, 7), but in *Bend Sinister* it is given as "*sogliadataĭ*" (*BS*, 202). Sometimes the systems may alternate within the space of a single text: in Foreword to *The Defense* the Russian title of the novel is first given as *Zashchita Luzhina* (*Df*, 7) and in the next paragraph as *Zaschchita Luzhina* (*ibid*); in *Mary* one of the protagonists is identified both as "Alfyorov" (*M*, 1 *passim*) and "Alferov" (179, 182). I have tried to honor all such idiosyncrasies in my quotations.

If it is not indicated otherwise, the translations from Russian are mine. In these cases an asterix [*] will precede the translated excerpt. An alphabetic list of all abbreviations used for Nabokovian titles is given in Appendix 1. For abbreviations of narratological terms the reader is referred to Appendix 2.

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NABOKOV'S POETICS: AN INTRODUCTION

> [. . .] *pod zavistlivym okom finna.*
> (*G* R, 383)
>
> [. . .] with the Finn looking enviously on.
> (*G*, 323)

0.1 *Preliminary Delimitations*

Vladimir Nabokov's career as a writer spanned six decades. His earliest datable text, an untitled brochure of Russian verse, was printed in 1914 while the future novelist was attending the Tenishev Lyceum in St. Petersburg. At the time of his death in 1977, near Montreux, Switzerland, the author was reportedly at work on the manuscript of his eighteenth novel.[1] In the intervening period (bracketed between the two inaccessible texts), VN put out a vast body of writing: not only fiction and verse, but also a series of dramatic pieces, autobiographic and essayistic prose, book-length studies on Russian and European authors, translations, chess-problems, and more than a dozen scientific papers on entomology. It is only today that we are beginning to grasp these diverse forms in terms of a single sustained project, an integrated Nabokovian "text" in its own right.

In approaching this construct I have in mind two considerations that, while complementary in nature, also call forth separate analytic procedures. On one hand, we are tempted by the sheer volume of the corpus. The Nabokovian opus challenges us to find its invariants: its recurrent thematic concerns, compositional principles, and covert aesthetic assumptions – or, in one word, the inbuilt *poetics* determining its surface structures. At the same time, we should not forget that what alerted us (probably all of us) to these questions in the first place was still the author's accomplishment as a novelist. It can be rightfully assumed, I think, that many of the pervasive problems in the canon are to be unearthed precisely by focusing on VN's prose fiction. I shall consequently choose as the chief subject of this study the narrative structure in

---

1. Tentatively titled *Original of Laura,* the novel, like the initial verse book, remains unavailable for the present examination. According to information given by the author's son in "On Revisiting Father's Room" (D. NABOKOV 1979, 129), prior to his death VN expressly forbade the release of his unfinished projects. The author's first poetic efforts have been commemorated in Chapter Eleven of his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (215–27), but the brochure itself is no longer extant.

Nabokovian prose and, with the subject, also the attendant conceptual framework: that of narrative theory, or *narratology*.

My first remarks are intended to sort out the order of priorities between these two focal points of orientation.

Narratology

With "narratology" we are not referring to one approach, but rather to a range of alternatives. Modern theory of fiction derives its concepts from a notoriously wide array of sources. The Russian Formalist school and its system of plot-composition analysis; the Anglo-American tradition of point-of-view studies and related work done on narrative "situations" on the German side; developments on the area of structural linguistics and the breakthrough of discourse (or "speech-act") analysis; elaborations of these models within factions of French and Soviet literary Structuralism – all partake in the current way of conceiving narrative structure. Therefore, while the present study may at places give the impression of leaning somewhat heavily on certain established traditions, this should not be taken to imply adherence to tenets put forth only by a single "school". VN's narrative art may be profitably studied from several vantage points, and one does not deem it necessary to eschew interesting problems merely for fear of analytic eclecticism.

On the other hand, it should be as evident that a mapping of the field is nowadays no longer possible by aid of a simple enumeration of historical sources. During the past decade or two narratology has emerged as a full-fledged scholarly discipline, with its globally accepted norms and goals, if still not altogether sharply demarcated borderlines.[2] Taken the recent influx of studies published within the narratological framework, one may well be wary of still another one parading the very concept in its title. It is opportune, then, to mark down also some points of divergence between the aims of properly narratological inquiry and those pursued in the present enterprise.

The former have been concisely defined by TODOROV in an essay entitled "Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1969). "The aim of [structural analysis]", as Todorov writes in his well-known formulation, "will never be the description of a concrete work" (70). Nor will this aim be the analysis of any particular series of works, or of a concrete canon, but rather the discovery of the abstract "spectrum of literary possibilities" (71), illustrated in particular narratives. Hence the analyst of narrative structure cannot interest himself in separate novels, but only in their capacity to manifest the novelistic discourse in general – a discourse that is, in Todorov's phrase, "virtual rather than real" (70).[3]

Our principal deviation from this program, even if a predictable one (after all, I have just named the concrete canon to be studied), still bears some additional qualification.

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2. I refrain, at this point of the inquiry, from defining in more detail the legitimate domain of narratological investigation. A comprehensive survey of the field has been presented by CHATMAN 1978. I shall be returning to Chatman's eminently applicable scheme at various points in my study. For some of the latest developments see STANZEL 1982; RIMMON-KENAN 1983; GENETTE 1983. For a streamlined account cf. also TAMMI 1980a plus 1983a.

3. For other discussions cf. his "Poetics and Criticism" (TODOROV 1971, 29–41); CHATMAN 1978, 17–19; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 1–6.

VN was himself ever ready to offer advice for his analysts, and in this instance his comments turn out to have direct bearing on our inquiry. "One of the functions of all my novels is to prove that the novel in general does not exist" (*SO*, 115), VN retorted, when asked by a well-meaning interviewer to specify the "function" of his writing with regard to general novelistic trends. In another interview, commenting on his attitude towards "anti-novelists", he has said that "every original novel is 'anti-' because it does not resemble the genre or kind of its predecessor" (*SO*, 173). He has also explicitly forbidden critics to use properties in his fiction "as abstractions" (*SO*, 305), systematically deriding any analytic attempt at "pigeonholing" individual literary texts into generic classes (e.g. *SO*, 170; *EO* 3, 32–7; *Lectures 1,* 116; *Lectures 3,* 11).

The humorously polemical intent of all such statements notwithstanding (this, too, is a recurrent feature in Nabokovian writing), the point itself proves a valid one. There would be peculiarly little interest in an approach to the author's works as straightforward illustrations of narratological universals. Though such a study could no doubt be written, its results would not only be trivial, but in the end they would distort the very essence of the examined materials. For what is distinctive to VN's narrative practice is precisely the consistency with which standard novelistic categories are distorted, played with, and parodically upended in his fiction. Any analyst innocuously setting about to induce from the canon the abstract structure of the novel "in general" will soon find himself confounded by curious anomalies, marginal cases, and exceptions to commonly accepted rules that no textbook will account for. The Nabokovian narrative, to make use of still another patent formulation, can ultimately be said to illustrate nothing, if not "only itself" (cf. GENETTE [1972, 22] on a related problem in Proust's work).[4]

And yet, parodic play – however extended – cannot detract from the workability of theoretical abstractions as such. Even if VN's narratives are instrumental in posing shrewd questions about novelistic conventions, they hardly render the novel as a genre non-extant, as the author would have it. Rather, they should wrench us to an even deeper awareness of the aforesaid "spectrum" of literary possibilities. This is specifically why such a prominent role will be reserved for narratological reflection also in the following chapters. While we do not want to reduce VN's texts into simple test cases for one theoretical model or another, it is apparent that to isolate the anomalies we must be equipped to recognize the norm. In the end, as I shall be arguing all through the subsequent analyses, the best test *for the models themselves* may well be their application to the Nabokovian idiosyncrasies through which the norms and boundaries are transgressed.

Poetics

Also the second key concept in my title requires qualification. The title, which I borrow from the classic study by BAKHTIN on Dostoevskij's poetics (1929; 1963),[5] should not be misconstrued. It is not *all* Bakhtin that I wish to appropriate here. With

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4. In another instance, TODOROV has also said that the most relevant context for a work like *The Charterhouse of Parma* is not novelistic discourse at large, but "the genre 'Stendhalian novel' which is created by precisely this work and a few others" (1971, 43). This statement does not agree with the aims of "structural analysis".

5. Originally titled *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (1929), the study was reissued by Bakhtin in an expanded and revised form as *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo* (1963). Unless

his status as the founder of a "sociological poetics"[6] I am not concerned. Possibly the best known of his single theoretical notions – i.e. that of "carnivalization" (for a condensed account cf. 1963, 100–13) – will not enter the present discussion (I do not think that it is applicable as such to VN's artistic practice). And while Bakhtin's insights into particular aspects of narrative structure will be regularly evoked in the analytic section, his master idea concerning "polyphony" in the novel will serve mainly as a counterpoint to VN's novelistic strategies. What interests us here is above all the Bakhtinian approach to the notion of "poetics" itself.

The term can be applied in two distinct senses. We may, first, use it to denote any overtly stated artistic doctrine, a catalogue of theoretical prescriptions, or a set of authorial *dicta,* regulating the construction of given texts. This is a far from negligible question when studying an author as theoretically self-conscious as VN, and we shall yet have much to say about his personal aesthetics. But, more importantly, we can also refer directly to the "doctrine" inhering in the structure of the concrete texts. The main object of our inquiry, as Bakhtin keeps reminding us, should not be the author's explicitly formulated "*Weltanschauung*", but "the principle of [the author's] *artistic* vision of the world" (1963, 8; Bakhtin's emphasis): the intrinsic plan that integrates the separate devices used by the author into a unified system (the idea is developed throughout Bakhtin's important introductory chapter; cf. 3–37).

From this it follows that no single "approach" will be sufficient in itself to account for a particular poetics. A novelist's achievement becomes understood with regard to "*the totality* of the special artistic devices of novelistic construction" (*ibid.,* 10; my emphasis).[7] Whatever our conceptual frame – narratology, stylistics, thematic analysis – the significance of the analysed components can be properly assessed only in relation to the literary system into which they belong. (Hence the well-known critique expressed by MEDVEDEV/BAKHTIN [1928, 111–16] of the formalist equation of literary structure with the "sum" of its compositional devices; such reductionism is not alien to present-day narratologists either.)

The handling of the Dostoevskian canon in *Problems* proves exemplary in this respect. Bakhtin proceeds, we recall, by first giving an explicit definition of the "main theme" in Dostoevskij's opus ("Affirmation – and non-affirmation – of the other's 'I' " [1963, 7]). He immediately hastens to point out, however, that his study will not concern

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indicated otherwise, all subsequent references are to the revised edition (rendered into English as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*). It is customary in Slavic scholarship to talk of an individual author's "poetics". Cf. e.g. *Poetika Chekhova* (CHUDAKOV 1971) or *Poetika Mikhaila Zoshchenko* (CHUDAKOVA 1979). For more on the uses of the term see CHERNOV 1974.

6. Based on his authorship of MEDVEDEV/BAKHTIN 1928. The book is subtitled *A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics.* For the problem of authorship in Bakhtin's newly discovered writings – present also in another of our frequently-cited sources, VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN 1930 – I refer to accounts by WEHRLE 1978, ix-xv, xxv; TITUNIK 1976, 329–30; IVANOV 1973, 342–3, 366–7. The latter was the first to survey in detail the comprehensive Bakhtinian corpus, its "rediscovery", and its significance for modern scholarship. For other approaches to Bakhtin's system cf. KRISTEVA 1970a; MORSON 1978; POMORSKA 1978; TITUNIK 1981. I have been greatly aided in my own discussion by insights provided in PESONEN 1980.

7. For a related argument as applied to Chekhov's narrative art cf. CHUDAKOV 1971, esp. 3–8.

thematic import in the role of "the ethico-religious postulate which defines the *content* of the novel" (*ibid.;* Bakhtin's emphasis), but specifically as a structural principle (i.e. as a manifestation of Dostoevskij's "form-defining ideology" [67] – a usable phrase). He then goes on to examine the concrete expressions of the theme on the compositional plane of the studied texts, in their systems of narrative point of view, plot-construction, and manipulation of stylistic devices. In this way, he arrives at the famous definition of Dostoevskij's novels as intricately staged "dialogues" (213–27 and *passim*), held together by the pervasive concern with "the other" on every level of the literary structure. The overall result of the analysis does not bear any longer on the simple discovery of the theme, but on a synthetic vision of the distinctively Dostoevskian text.[8]

It is chiefly in the same spirit that I shall be trying to approach VN's literary system. We are not interested in an isolated compartment holding "narrative devices" or "narrativity" as such (the ideal propounded in Todorov's previous scheme), nor are we willing to operate with any other formal-stylistic categories (despite the often-stated view of VN as "merely" a stylist). But even less do we wish to study a separate Nabokovian "world-view", or to present proof that the canon does, after all, contain profound ideas (a notion lampooned by VN all through his literary career). The central problems to be discussed here will emerge from the indivisible *co-occurrence* of the thematic-ideational – Bakhtin would say "ideological" – and compositional aspects of the system.

My analysis purports to examine, not all but a representative selection of such questions. While concentrating on narrative structure, I also propose to take up certain transverse sections, or synchronic slices, from the comprehensive opus. I hope to demonstrate how its properties correlate and hold together, how separate devices are given a thematic import, and how a whole is formed.

0.2 *The Choice of Primary Sources*

> [1] But when we say 'Structure' we are not thinking of the workshop. Rough drafts, false scents, half-explored trails, dead ends of inspiration, are of little intrinsic importance. An artist should ruthlessly destroy his manuscripts after publication, lest they mislead academic mediocrities into thinking that it is possible to unravel the mysteries of genius by studying canceled readings. In art, purpose and plan are nothing; only the result counts. [. . .] It is [. . .] the structure of the end product, and of the end product only, that has meaning for the student – or at least this student – confronted with a master artist's work. (*EO* 1, 15–16)

VN's literary-theoretical precepts (here occasioned by the necessity of choosing between several variants when studying Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin*) are often so designed as to anticipate the problems posed for the analyst by his own writing. Also the student of the Nabokovian corpus finds before him the task of selecting his primary sources from

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8. In this respect, at any rate, I don't agree with IVANOV, who says that "for [Bakhtin] the technical aspect of the study of art was always secondary" (1973, 332). With regard to the approach in *Problems* "technical" analysis cannot be considered secondary any more than primary, for it is the necessary prerequisite for understanding the totality of the artistic system.

a maze of variants and rewritten versions, "half-explored trails" representing diverse phases in the author's creative development. The background reasons for this situation have been amply documented elsewhere and need only be enumerated here.[9]

(i) *Discrepancy between Editions.* There is, first, the question (cumbersome, to be sure) of finding one's way among the multiple editions, printings, and reprintings. When VN began putting out his works as "Vladimir Sirin"[10] in Berlin in the early 1920's his published texts took no uniform format. His shorter pieces were distributed among a variety of Russian émigré almanacs, journals, and daily newspapers. His novels usually went through long spells of serialization, and in certain instances the prepublication pieces preceded the published book by several years.[11] An identical pattern was observed during the earlier stages of VN's English-writing period in the 1940's, when a large portion of his texts made their first appearances on the pages of American cultural journals. (E.g. each of the stories making up *Nine Stories* and *Nabokov's Dozen*; also four chapters from *Pnin* came out as "short stories" between 1953 and 1955 before the printing of the complete novel in 1957.)

Eventually, as the texts were collected and reissued in book form the process resulted in a mass of discrepancies between the reprints and their originals. When these are clearly due to outside interference – deriving either from censorship, or a careless printer – no actual problem exists for the reader. The entire Chapter Four of *The Gift* (one fourth of the novel) was censored by the Russian émigré editors upon the initial serialization, and the complete text had to await its publication for more than fifteen years (Foreword to *G*, 7). Similar restorations of previously rejected materials are not uncommon in VN's works, and in each case it is evidently the author whose last word is to be honored.[12]

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9. *Vladimir Nabokov: Bibliographie des Gesamtwerks* by ZIMMER (1963) presents the first effort to catalogue all of VN's Russian, English, and French writings, many of which remained still unlocated at the time of this initial venture. Several additions were made by FIELD in an appendix to his critical study (1967, 353–80), and a nearly full listing appears in his 250-page *Nabokov: A Bibliography* (1973). These findings have been augmented in the running list of corrections published in *VNRN* (No:s 1 [1978, 18–22]; 2 [1979, 26–34]; 4 [1980, 39–46]; cf. also "Descriptive Bibliography" by JULIAR 1982a and b). A competent analysis of the changes that VN's texts have undergone in translation is given in a study by GRAYSON (1977); and the extra-textual vagaries of his career are traced by FIELD in the only full-length biography published so far (1977).

10. Pseudonymous publication was, and is, a common practice among Russian writers. In VN's case it allowed a differentiation between his own texts and those put out by his father V.D. Nabokov, the noted publicist and statesman (FIELD 1977, 149–50). Other Nabokovian pseudonyms include: "Vivian Calmbrood [*Kalmbrud*]", "Valentin Nabokov", "Vasilij Shishkov", "Cantab", and possibly "F.G.-Ch." (FIELD 1967, 54; FOSTER 1971, 367, 797).

11. Witness the phases gone through by *Otchajanie* (*Ds* R), the first installments of which came out in the Paris-based émigré organ *Poslednie novosti* as early as 1932 and 1933. The text was serialized in 1934 in *Sovremennye zapiski,* another Paris publication, but it came out in book form only in 1936 through the Berlin publishing firm Petropolis. Similarly mottled printing histories cause difficulties in dating in the cases of *Podvig* (*Gl* R [1931–2, 1933]), *Kamera obskura* (*LD* R [1931, 1932–3]), *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*IB* R [1935–6, 1938]), or *Dar* (*G* R [1937–8, 1952]).

12. So e.g. a burlesque scene between two homosexual characters was replaced by a double row of suspension dots in the 1940 *Sovremennye zapiski* -version of "*Solus Rex*" (SR R, 23). The

But there are also instances in which we may be at a loss to determine the true nature of the discrepancy. What is one to make e.g. of the inexplicable deletion of the final two paragraphs, containing the deft "trick ending", from all present reprintings of "The Assistant Producer"? Is this, too, an authorial revision, or is it merely an editorial oversight? Should we prefer the established, if amputated, version of the story? Or should we search out the discarded, but narratively more meaningful original?[13]

Not even alleged misprints are unproblematic in this respect (VN again refers to this in *EO* 1, 15–16). The simple omission of one letter from the final clause of Part One, Chapter Forty-Three, in *Ada* is enough to transform the reference to Cordula de Prey's impregnation in the original ("When in early September Van Veen left Manhattan for Lute, she was pregnant" [*A*, 325]), into a curiously metaphoric one ("[. . .] he was pregnant" [*A* 1970, 257]), suggesting Van's own "impregnation" by his literary labors.[14] One may again query the primacy of the two readings.

(ii) *Bilingual Variants.* Moreover, there is the question of choosing between the original editions and their subsequent recastings in either of VN's two native languages. The active part taken by the author in preparing the English versions of his early fiction is well known.[15] The project was initiated in 1959 – immediately at the outset of the post-*Lolita* era – with the publication of *Invitation to a Beheading*, and it was by and large completed at the time of VN's death eighteen years later (the last selection of his translated stories was included in *Details of a Sunset* in 1976). Having previously translated two of his Russian novels solely by himself (*Despair* and *Laughter in the Dark*, issued in the author's English versions in the late 1930's), VN now worked from rough drafts submitted to him by assisting translators (cf. e.g. Forewords to *IB*, 6–7; *G*, 8–9; *KQKn*, vi-vii; *Gl*, ix). In two cases (those of the 1967 edition of *Lolita* and *Drugie berega*, the 1954 version of the autobiography) he rendered a text originally composed in English into Russian. In every instance it was VN himself who assumed full responsibility for the final text, its stylistic ordering, revisions, and omissions. (For typical assertions of authorship cf. Foreword to *RB*, xi; Bibliographic Note to *ND*, 175.)

In this way, though other areas of VN's writing still remain largely untranslated,[16]

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scene was restored only in the 1973 reprinting (SR; *RB*, 204). Deletions and revisions were accomplished by VN's American publishers as well, as we learn from his dismayed letter of June 17, 1945 (*Letters*, 154). The prospective publishers of *Lolita* would appear to have demanded the rewriting of the whole book, but here the author no longer concurred ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L*, 304).

13. I include this footnote as an appeal to the publisher. Only the two final paragraphs in the story allow the conclusion that VN's narrator has not himself comprehended all the facts transmitted in his discourse. The ending figures still in the 1947 version (*NS*, 95), but it has been missing since the inclusion of "The Assistant Producer" in *Nabokov's Dozen* (cf. *ND*, 59–74).

14. For the subtextual implications in the same excert, possibly accounting for the gradation of the pronouns, cf. my note in *VNRN* (TAMMI 1981a).

15. For the full history of VN's career as a translator I refer to GRAYSON 1977, 5–12 *passim*. Cf. also FIELD (1977, 206–7) and the testimony by VN's co-translator D. NABOKOV 1984.

16. Thirty-nine of VN's Russian poems (out of a corpus of more than three hundred) are given in the author's literal, unrhymed versions in *Poems and Problems*. One play (out of nine Russian texts) has been reissued in English as *The Waltz Invention*, and a single essay ("On Hodasevich") is included in *Strong Opinions* (223–7).

his narrative fiction comes to us in essentially three separate series. There are the novels and stories originally composed in Russian. There is the almost equally large portion of works composed in English. And there is the entirely problematic group of recastings from one language to another, completed by the author and vying for precedence with the originals in the "definitive" corpus.[17]

(iii) *Revisions.* The above is not all. In the course of translating and reissuing his former works VN also introduced into them a number of quite substantial reworkings, or "revampments" as he himself termed them (Foreword to *Ds*, 8; *TD*, 39).[18] Such emendations, even if not carried through to the same extent in separate texts, are in evidence in virtually all translations done by VN. While novels like *Mary* (cf. Foreword, xii-xiii), *The Gift*, the Russian *Lolita* or the majority of the short fiction, remain basically unaltered, with changes occurring only in local stylistic features, in many other instances the revisions affect the basic structuring of the narrative. *King, Queen, Knave, Laughter in the Dark, Despair,* the drama *The Waltz Invention,* or the author's own memoir, among some other thoroughly revamped texts, contain dozens of new episodes, newly characterized heroes, and even essentially new narrative-compositional designs.[19] In their revised form, these works can hardly be taken to illustrate VN's artistic goals at the time of their original composition. They are, rather, new works in their own right, reflecting the level of the author's art at the very summit of his career.

In the face of such problems – properly belonging to the domain of antiquarian research – one may follow three alternate courses, each of them to my mind equally legitimate. We might, first, choose to concentrate on the series of unrevised first editions, in which case the main emphasis would be in tracing the developmental strands in VN's career. Alternatively, we could also write a comparative study of all extant versions, which would keep the emphasis on diachronic developments, but the chronology of most works would become considerably more involuted. Thirdly, we may decide to forgo comparisons altogether and to study only the final versions of the works. In this case our interest will be directed towards the strictly synchronic aspects in the corpus.

The first two methods have much to recommend themselves (they are obviously the more "scholarly" ones), and if I shall now opt for the third alternative, this is not to

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17. In addition, there is a minor group of texts composed directly in French. (VN stayed more or less permanently in Paris between 1937 and 1940; cf. *SM*, 306–9; FIELD 1977, 201–28.) "*Mademoiselle O*" (MO F), published in the journal *Mesures* in 1936, belongs to a trilingual series (there is an error in FIELD [1973, 115], where the year is given as 1939): it was first rendered into English in 1943 to be separately printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, appended in 1951 to the first version of *Speak, Memory* (*SM* 1951, 58–83; cf. also *ND*, 143–59), and eventually revised and retranslated into Russian for the 1954 edition (*SM* R, 85–110). Further revised, the text appears as Chapter Five of the definitive 1966 version (*SM*, 95–118). VN also wrote an essay on Pushkin entitled "*Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable*" (1937), and later supervised the translation of some of his novels into French (cf. his notes on this in "*Postskriptum*" to *L* R, 298; Interview 1975, 68).

18. In prefacing *Invitation to a Beheading*, he humorously deplores the absence of any single verb containing the sense of: "To abridge, expand, or otherwise alter or cause to be altered, for the sake of belated improvement, one's own writings in translation" (6–7).

19. The pervasive trend in all Nabokovian revisions is provided by a heightened emphasis on stylization, parody, and self-parodic play. I shall return to this in some later sections of the study. The tendency has been given a full treatment in GRAYSON 1977.

underestimate the comparative approach. Indeed, my choice is in part dictated by the existence of several valuable studies already written on VN's methods of revision. In addition to work done on individual translations,[20] the book-length discussion by GRAYSON (1977) provides a more than comprehensive account of the overall relationship between the Russian originals and their English counterparts. Though separate additions to these findings can still be made, in the main there would remain little new ground to break for this line of inquiry.

My other justification comes from the author (cf. above ex. [1]). "Structure" is what also the present study proposes to discuss, and the adopted perspective necessarily entails a certain delimitation of materials. This will mean, in our case, that we shall concentrate on *the latest English-language version* of each work. When a revised translation exists, it will always be chosen as our primary source, and its Russian original will be of only secondary interest. When discrepancies occur between separate editions, *the last version for which VN was responsible* will be regarded as the definitive one. If comparisons between bilingual variants are made (after all, VN himself examines some of Pushkin's drafts in his Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*), this is solely for the purpose of highlighting a specific narrative problem. The main focus will always stay on "the end product", the synchronic whole rather than the chronological series.

Adherence to this rule[21] renders us a corpus consisting of seventeen novels (nine of them originally conceived in Russian), fifty-two short stories (eleven of which were written in English), all included in the four definitive anthologies,[22] plus the last version of *Speak, Memory*. VN's autobiographic narrative holds a seminal position in the canon, and – with due precaution to its not being "fiction" – the work will be included in the present discussion.

In addition, the author's writing in other genres will be regularly consulted. VN's verse in particular contains a veritable repository of characteristically Nabokovian concerns that help us to specify given aspects of his prose fiction as well. Nor shall we refrain from evoking public statements made by the author outside his fiction. These *dicta* will be selected mainly from VN's numerous critical writings, but also from the

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20. Cf. PROFFER (1968b and 1970) on *Despair* and *King, Queen, Knave;* APPEL (1974, 260–9) on the two English versions of *Laughter in the Dark;* HUGHES (1970) on *Invitation to a Beheading;* CUMMINS (1977) on the Russian *Lolita;* and NAUMANN (1978) on revisions in a portion of the short stories.

21. The necessary exception is provided by *Lolita*, which we shall be citing according to its original English, rather than the later Russian, edition. When the two versions diverge in any of their narrative aspects – as they on occasion do – this will be separately noted. There exists a special "dictionary" contrasting the uses of Russian and English words in these two editions. Cf. NAKHIMOVSKY–PAPERNO 1982.

22. Each collection (*Nabokov's Dozen, A Russian Beauty, Tyrants Destroyed, Details of a Sunset*) contains thirteen stories. This figure is made to include also "Mademoiselle O" and "First Love" (both in *ND*), despite their subsequent inclusion in *Speak, Memory*. *"Solus Rex"* and *"Ultima Thule"* were originally intended as chapters in the author's tenth Russian novel (cf. the introductory note in *RB*, 147). I omit, on the other hand, the six untranslated Russian stories (two of them, "*Port*" and "*Blagost'* ", are collected in *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* [17–26; 157–64]; bibliographic information concerning the other four is given in FIELD 1973, 104–6; NAUMANN 1978, 223–4). In prefacing *Details of a Sunset*, VN described the collection as "the last batch of [his] Russian stories *meriting to be Englished*" (11; my emphasis), ousting, in effect, the remaining texts from the "definitive" corpus.

scores of interviews (partially collected in *Strong Opinions*), lectures (collected in *Lectures 1–3*), and published correspondence (*Letters*). Though the latter materials would undoubtedly provide ample food for biographic conjectures, they will be cited here only for the light that they may cast on the strictly literary side of our author's career.

As no "Collected Works" of VN's writing exist, paginal reference is of necessity to a mottled selection of editions.[23] In the case of suspected misprints, deletions, or other doubtful readings, every effort has been made to check them against other printings. (Hence we shall accept the metaphoric reading of Van Veen's "pregnancy", for this is suggested by all later editions of *Ada*.)

0.3 *The Legacy of Nabokov Scholarship*

The corpus of Nabokovian writing cannot be discussed without reference to the readings that it has elicited. While no "history" of the author's reception will be attempted here (surely a subject for a small study of its own),[24] I still suggest that it will prove useful to delineate the main approaches so far applied to the canon. Certain presuppositions underlie assessments written at various points of time, certain critical trends have already been established. Before exposing our own notions we may do well to relate them to the prevalent traditions.

(i) *Russian Readings.* The first assessments of VN's work appeared in émigré press. If his early collections of verse were greeted with somewhat less than enthusiasm,[25] the subsequent emergence of Sirin the prosaist created at least a moderate acclaim. *Mary* was reviewed, on the whole favorably, by important critics like MOCHUL'SKIJ (1926) – the future literary historian – and STRUVE (1926), later one of VN's more perceptive émigré readers, who was quick to surmise that the author's real future lies in the domain of prose-writing (*"[. . .] already [. . .] in the very deficiencies of [Sirin's] verse one has sensed a good novelist").[26] Four years later *The Defense* was pronounced by many as one of the most remarkable novels to have been published in emigration (STRUVE 1930; ANDREEV 1930; VEJDLE 1930; cf. also KHODASEVICH 1937, 99; BERBEROVA 1970a, 225), and during the next decade VN's work was regularly

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23. The most uniform series of the English novels and stories is the one put out by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in London between 1959 and 1976. Reprints of original Russian texts have been published by Ardis in Ann Arbor, Michigan since 1974. I have not in every instance been able to secure copies of these editions.

24. *Vladimir Nabokov: A Reference Guide* by SCHUMAN (1979) remains the basic introduction to the subject. I have tried to supplement some addenda and corrigenda to Schuman's groundwork in TAMMI 1981b. More recently, a selection of materials written on the author by American and British critics was published in the "Critical Heritage" series (PAGE 1982). Additional remarks occur in PARKER 1984.

25. *Gornyj put'* was tersely described as "*skuchnaja kniga* [*a boring book]" by LUR'E 1923. *Grozd'* was dismissed as "*nebol'shaja no ochen' skuchnaja kniga* [*a small but exceedingly boring book]" ("G." 1923). The view that *"there is not a single good poem by Sirin" (VEJDLE 1930) followed VN through his whole Russian writing career.

26. Afterwards, in *The Gift*, VN had the fictive poet-critic Koncheyev express a similar assessment with regard to Fyodor's early verse: "By the way, I've read your very remarkable collection of poems. Actually, of course, they are but the models of your future novels" (73).

discussed in Russian publications. After 1940, when a forcible end was put to the initial phase of Nabokov criticism, only some occasional pieces have appeared in the surviving émigré organs.

In recent years there has occurred an increase in scholarly interest towards this segment of Russian cultural history (concurrently with the growth of attention paid to VN's own writing: the two developments are not unrelated.) A number of studies dealing with émigré subjects have come out.[27] Literary criticism written in exile has received its own chroniclers,[28] and even critical writing occasioned by VN's early work has been separately surveyed. (A useful listing is given in STRUVE 1956, 278–90. For other discussions cf. KARLINSKY 1970; FIELD 1973, 179–95; FOSTER 1974; NAUMANN 1974; GRAYSON 1977, 232–7.)

Reading through much of this material, however, one may be struck by a common tendency. Present-day commentators tend to treat their sources with something of a ceremony: it is quite often that the materials are discussed solely for their documentary interest, while no assessment is given of the émigré contribution on its own merit. This attitude has to my mind resulted in an exaggerated importance attached to at least some of the documents. For even though there is no denying the historical value of firsthand sources, the fact should not be ignored that with respect to literary analysis – and even more from the standpoint of analysing VN's work – such writings are of only a very limited applicability.[29] I wish to verify this with a glance at a few concrete instances.

In 1939, while VN was finishing his career as a Russian writer, the critic OSOKIN[30] summarized much of the émigré consensus in his remarks on the Sirinian achievement. Basing his contention on *Invitation to a Beheading,* Osokin wrote:

> * Any reading of Sirin's recent work will be attended by a feeling of both enchantment and exasperation. There is talent, very much talent indeed, and at the same time there is also inescapable superficiality. Separate pages emanate talent, as do separate scenes and images [. . .], and at the same time these individual flashes are not tied together. [. . .] Of late, Sirin has started on a very dangerous path – that of external acrobatics and inner schematization and simplification.
> (1939, 199)

Such was precisely the main charge levelled against VN by most of his early appraisers. Similarly OSORGIN, another regular reviewer,[31] stated with regard to *Glory* that while

27. A representative selection has been collected in the anthology by KARLINSKY and APPEL (1977). For studies devoted in their entirety to émigé cultural life in Germany and Berlin – VN's main location during his European period – cf. R. WILLIAMS 1971 and 1972 (VN is discussed on 324–30). The essential sources for all such inquiries are provided in the memoirs and literary essays put out by the émigré writers themselves. See KHODASEVICH 1954; ADAMOVICH 1955; STRUVE 1956; VARSHAVSKIJ 1956; BERBEROVA 1969 and 1970a. For a detailed survey of the latter materials cf. ANDREEV 1972.

28. PLETNEV 1972; IL'IN 1972; HAGGLUND 1973. Cf. also the two-volume *Bibliography of Russian Emigré Literature 1918–1968* by FOSTER 1971.

29. I do not agree with the view proposed by FIELD that if the émigré critiques of VN's Russian work had been known to the American public, "it is extremely unlikely that *Lolita* or *Pale Fire* would have been nearly as misunderstood as they were" (1967, 5).

30. This was a pseudonym, as were so many of the other surnames and initials figuring in émigré publications (STRUVE 1956, 241; FOSTER 1971, 845). VN himself made full use of the tradition. Cf. above n. 10.

31. Cf. also his articles on *Mary* (1926) and *Laughter in the Dark* (1934). "Osorgin", too, was a pseudonym, standing for the journalist M.A. Il'in (HAGGLUND 1973, 516).

the work was *"written with brilliance and convincing formal mastery" it nonetheless "somewhat frightens the reader with its inner irrelevance" (1932). An identical notion – if articulated with more lyricism – was put forward by VARSHAVSKIJ:

> * What amazes us in Sirin, is pre-eminently the almost oppressive wealth of physical detail and energy. [In *Glory*] everything is abundantly luscious and colorful, and somehow exuberant. But behind this all-empowering overflow there lies an emptiness, an emptiness like the one that reigns over a shoal, frightening expressly for the absence of a depth.
> (1933, 266)

And it would not be difficult, were it necessary, to list literally dozens of related argumentations, ignited by the appearance of each new Sirin title. Still in 1955 ADAMOVICH, reputedly the most influential of all émigré critics,[32] returned to the formula in his book of literary reminiscences:

> * We read [VN's prose] – and we become enchanted: how talented, how brilliant! But there is also immediate confusion, and quite soon you are shrugging your shoulders: for what does this brilliance exist? Is brilliance on the whole necessary in contemporary literature? What lies behind it? For what specific purpose is this perpetual endeavor to amaze devised? From what does the characteristically Nabokovian, dry and lethal sorrow originate? What is wrong with this rare gift?
> (212)

There is no need, of course, to engage in polemics with these assessments, many of which were expressed more than fifty years ago.[33] But their quotation was necessary to demonstrate why VN's first readers are so seldom evoked in the following chapters. In harping on the author's "inner irrelevance" or the alleged "emptiness" of his writing (its lack of any spiritual "lesson" to the reader)[34] the critics were directing their attention to questions that will concern the present approach only in marginal ways. On the other hand, in insisting on the divorce between VN's "external acrobatics" and any sort of thematic content, they were proceeding from premises that are not compatible with those adopted here. (I have already maintained that I am interested specifically in *the conjunction* between the two.)

Therefore, it is not so much for a neglect of literary-historical sources that the émigré contribution will be largely bypassed here, but rather for a lack of any common theoretical ground. When the insights provided by VN's more astute Russian critics

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32. Cf. ANDREEV 1972, 32–3; HAGGLUND 1973. VN has described his long strife with Adamovich in Chapter Fourteen of *Speak, Memory* (284–5). He also takes up the issue in his introductory note to "Vasiliy Shishkov" (*TD*, 204–6).

33. It is another matter that similar prejudices are alive and well in more recent Nabokov criticism. This is the notion that was inelegantly echoed in the obituary for the author in *The New York Times* in July 1977: "Puzzlemaker or Titan?" (LEHMANN-HAUPT 1977).

34. "'*Nikakogo 'zhizneuchinenija'* [. . .] *net* [*There is no 'lesson for life']" (VARSHAVSKIJ 1933, 267). Cf. also the contrast drawn by ZAJCEV in his "'*Buninskij' mir i 'Sirinskij' mir*" (1929) between Sirinian irrelevance and the "seriousness" ascribed to Bunin's world-view. The Bunin-Sirin opposition was to become another commonplace in Russian criticism. It resurfaced even in the introductory essay included in the first Soviet edition of Bunin's work (cf. TVARDOVSKIJ 1965, 29–30) and, still more recently, in a book by one of VN's lesser émigré colleagues (SHAKHOVSKAJA 1979, 115–18).

– the above should not be taken to indicate that there were none at all[35] – have bearing on any of the analysed problems, this will always be separately noted. But for the central traditions of Nabokov scholarship we must go elsewhere.

(ii) *The American "Delegation"* (Foreword to *KQKn,* viii). VN's writing received wider attention among the Anglo-American reading public after the initially scandalous success of *Lolita.* His reputation was established with the publication of *Pale Fire* and *Ada,* the well-publicized scholarly controversy surrounding his translation of *Evgenij Onegin* (a scandal in its own way), as well as the gradual unfolding of his Russian *tvorchestvo* throughout the 1960's. The growth of critical interest devoted to the author follows the same contours. More substantial assessments of his work began coming out in the late 1950's ("the odd silence around [VN's] name" serves as the motivating force behind one of the best of these; cf. NEMEROV 1957, 313).[36] Their number grew – exponentially – after *Pale Fire* and the first wave of the translated novels,[37] and the appearance of the now classic "Nabokov-issues" of leading critical quarterlies (DEMBO 1967a; APPEL-NEWMAN 1970), the pioneering survey of VN's Russian and English writings by FIELD (1967), and the annotated edition of *Lolita* by APPEL (1970a),[38] signalled the start of a veritable academic industry that is now well into its second decade.

To date (December 1984), at least thirty-five book-length monographs on VN have appeared; scores of unpublished doctoral dissertations have been written on the author in United States alone; briefer scholarly articles have so far filled eleven anthologies; and the number of uncollected pieces must surely be counted in thousands. In all, judging from the volume of research already completed,[39] it would appear that VN – originally a Russian writer – is today among the most energetically studied modern American novelists. Certain developments within this, otherwise heterogeneous, field of research should be noted.

So far, most critics writing on the author have concentrated on producing separate "readings" of single texts, either combining the discussions into larger monographs (of concrete books on VN the majority observes this method), or alternatively devoting briefer papers to the explication of a given text, with less attention paid to its position in the rest of the canon. In the case of perceptive readers the results have often been

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35. Besides Struve's work, mention should be made of articles by ANDREEV 1930; VEJDLE 1936; KHODASEVICH 1937. A piece entitled "*Bremja pamjati*" (1934) – i.e. "The Burden of Memory" – by KANTOR was the first treatment of the theme of "the past" in VN's writing. Still, none of these contributions exceeds the length of a few printed pages.

36. The first references to VN in American and British journals had been made as early as in the 1930's in surveys by PARRY (1933; cf. also 1971) and STRUVE (1934). The latter hence gains the distinction of being the first critic to have introduced VN's work for both Russian and Anglo-American audiences.

37. Also outside USA. Cf. two perceptive papers by ZIMMER (1964; 1965) – VN's German translator – and others by CROFTS (1965) and NILSSON (1968) in Sweden; VORTRIEDE (1966) in Germany; ROVET (1966) in France. In 1964 the French journal *L'Arc* devoted an issue to the author, featuring a range of contributors from Mary McCarthy to Alain Robbe-Grillet (MICHA 1964a).

38. STEGNER (1966) was the first book-length study to come out, but it is a superficial work.

39. And even more from the list of "Work in Progress", semi-annually updated in *The Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter. VNRN* has been published since 1978 at the University of Kansas.

impressive enough,[40] and it is obvious that no student of VN's fiction can today afford to ignore the findings proffered by the great originals in the field. But, on the whole, it still seems doubtful whether this is the method that future analysts should automatically choose. Taken to its extreme, this type of investigation assumes the form of pure annotation, and it is worth noticing that more than one of the studies published on the author are expressly presented as annotative guidebooks to local textual problems.[41] In prefacing a recent collection of essays devoted to VN, ROSS even speculates that "future critics [of VN's novels], like Dante scholars who work on lone cantos, will devote entire articles to single chapters" (1979b, 394).

Precisely the opposite program is promoted here. After almost two decades of close reading and annotation, there is an apparent need in Nabokov scholarship of comprehensive studies concentrating on the artistic system underlying the individual texts. What critics often overlook is that VN's stylistic and narrative idiosyncrasies, fascinating in themselves, are also motivated by patterns of recurrence cutting through the entire bilingual writing career. It would seem that detailed analysis of these recurrent, distinctively Nabokovian literary devices, not only as they occur in isolated textual segments, chapters, or works, but also in the context of the author's overall "poetics", constitutes the most inviting task for the future – or the present – investigator.

(iii) *The Device-Oriented Approach.* Lately, some exemplary discussions have been published more or less on these lines. There exists a whole series of papers by JOHNSON (1974, 1978, 1979a and b, 1982a) exploring the form and function of "alphabetic devices" in VN's writing, convincingly demonstrating how even the smallest units of Nabokovian discourse may be integrated with its larger thematic concerns. There are several linguistics- and stylistics-inspired analyses of lexical and phonetic devices, punning, or figurative language in the author's prose. (On Russian prose-style see NAKHIMOVSKY 1977; on the English texts LOKRANTZ 1973 and BODENSTEIN 1977; for comparative points cf. PROFFER 1968a, 81–119 and GRAYSON 1977, 182–212.) There exists a number of studies by ROWE, who has continued contributing useful surveys of many essentially Nabokovian questions: wordplay (1971a, 21–48 and 1976a); black humor (1971b and 1974a); a variety of compositional devices (e.g. 1974b and 1976b; cf. also 1979a).

Closer to the present approach, there have come out some overt applications of structuralist and narratological models to portions of the corpus. Problems concerning plot-construction and the handling of narrative time have been treated in two essays by FLEISCHAUER (1971) and LANYI (1977). Three papers have been devoted to a systematic analysis of narrative voice and point of view in separate novels: RIMMON (1976a and b) on *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight;* TAMIR-GHEZ (1979) on *Lolita;*

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40. By way of example, I mention only the series of essays by ALTER on *Ada* (1969 and 1979), *Invitation to a Beheading* (1970), and *Pale Fire* (1975b) – surely among the shrewdest assessments so far written on these novels from any methodological standpoint.

41. *The Annotated Lolita* by APPEL (1970a) presents a classic of the method. Cf. also the meticulous collection of "keys" to the same novel by PROFFER (1968a) and his further commentaries on *Ada* (1974b) and *Look at the Harlequins* (1974c), or related efforts by PLARD 1974 and SPROWLES 1974. Also *VNRN* carries an "Annotations" section. VN has poked good-natured fun at his academic commentators in his "Notes to *Ada*" (*A* 1970, 463–77). Even these authorial auto-annotations have now been annotated. Cf. "Notes to Vivian Darkbloom's Notes to *Ada*" by RIVERS-WALKER 1982.

FREIWALD (1980/81) on *The Eye.* A book by COUTURIER (1979) – the first more substantial survey of VN's novels to be addressed to the French public – takes up many narrative problems that will prove relevant also here.[42] And finally – to return to Russian readings – in a recent study of *The Gift,* LEVIN (1981) has analyzed in quite admirable detail the narrative and stylistic problems contained in the novel, relating them to occurrences elsewhere in VN's Russian fiction, and producing in the process the best single account of the Nabokovian narrative to have appeared so far.

Although I shall be arguing with the above investigators on a variety of interpretative points, and though the view that I hope to provide of VN's narrative practice is in the end a more global one, it should be clear that it is from the latter line of analysis that my methodological cue is derived. My more detailed debts, agreements, and disagreements will be stated in the text.

0.4. *Nabokov's Thematic Dominant*

Structural Unity

I have proposed to study the Nabokovian opus as a unified whole. To begin with, let us mark down some explicit statements in the author's work on the subject of unity itself. Besides pointing towards one of the predominant themes in the analysed novels, these instances will also illustrate VN's method of supplying his texts with theoretical excursuses on those very processes that underlie their own construction. (I have already cited his views on "Structure" in ex. [1] above.)

Chapter Eleven in *Speak, Memory* deals with VN's early efforts as a Russian versifier. Having just delineated the circumstances surrounding the composition of his first published poem (215–17), the author interrupts the narrative to enter instead upon a discourse on the overall nature of literary composition. The switch from the role of a memoirist into that of a poetician (punctuated by the humorous quotation from the self-made philosopher, an anagrammatic *alter ego*) is a typically Nabokovian strategy:

> [2] But then, in a sense, all poetry is positional: to try to express one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness, is an immemorial urge. The arms of consciousness reach out and grope, and the longer they are the better. Tentacles, not wings, are Apollo's natural members. Vivian Bloodmark, a philosophical friend of mine, in later years, used to say that while the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space, the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time. Lost in thought, he taps his knee with his wandlike pencil, and at the same instant a car (New York licence plate) passes along the road, a child bangs the screen door of a neighboring porch, an old man yawns in a misty Turkestan orchard, a granule of cinder-gray sand is rolled by the wind on Venus, a Docteur Jacques Hirsch in Grenoble puts on his reading glasses, and trillions of other such trifles occur – all forming an instantateous and transparent organism of events, of which the poet (sitting in a lawn chair, at Ithaca, N.Y.) is the nucleus.
> (218)

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42. For a condensed English version cf. COUTURIER 1978. These studies contain a large number of insightful observations, but I don't agree with Couturier's emphasis on the "referentlessness" of VN's writing (e.g. 1978, 158–9, 162 *passim*). He is entirely correct in underlining that the author's narratives are structured as "games", but this should not lead to the texts' being deprived of thematic sense altogether. Cf. the view that interpretative problems in the Nabokovian narrative are of secondary interest "since it is merely a game" (1978, 167). The argument has its temptations, but I wish to show that it is false.

Any search through the author's writing will turn out a range of synonymic variants for the formula. In "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" – the concluding lecture in VN's course on the European novel – he defines literary inspiration for the benefit of the student:

> [3] A passerby whistles a tune at the exact moment that you notice the reflection of a branch in a puddle which in its turn, and simultaneously, recalls a combination of damp green leaves and excited birds in some old garden, and the old friend, long dead, suddenly steps out of the past, smiling and closing his dripping umbrella. The whole thing lasts one radiant second and the motion of impressions and images is so swift that you cannot check the exact laws which attend their recognition, formation, and fusion – why this pool and not another – and how exactly are all these parts correlated; it is like a jigsaw puzzle within the brain itself unable to observe how and why the pieces fit, and you experience a shuddering sensation of wild magic, of some inner resurrection, as if a dead man were revived by a sparkling drug which has been rapidly mixed in your presence.
> (*Lectures 1*, 377–8)

In *The Gift* it is VN's novelistic hero, the poet Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, who muses on a cognate phenomenon under the heading of "multi-level thinking" (*vide* Darkbloom's "cosmic synchronization" [*SM*, 218]):

> [4] [. . .] you look at a person and you see him as clearly as if he were fashioned of glass and you were the glass blower, while at the same time without in the least impinging upon that clarity you notice some trifle on the side – such as the similarity of the telephone receiver's shadow to a huge, slightly crushed ant, and (all this simultaneously) the convergence is joined by a third thought – the memory of a sunny evening at a Russian small railway station; i.e. images having no rational connection with the conversation you are carrying on while your mind runs around the outside of your own words and along the inside of those of your interlocutor.
> (158)

Sebastian Knight, another fictive writer, arrives at a related phrasing:

> [5] The blind man's dog near Harrods or a pavement-artist's colored chalks; brown leaves in a New Forest ride or a tin bath hanging outside on the black brick wall of a slum; a picture in Punch or a purple passage in *Hamlet*, all went to form a definite harmony, where I, too, had the shadow of a place.
> (*SK*, 65)

And even imprisoned Cincinnatus C. attempts to differentiate between himself and his dystopian jailers precisely in terms of his synchronizing and structure-perceiving competence:

> [6] I am not an ordinary – I am the one among you who is alive – Not only are my eyes different, and my hearing, and my sense of taste – not only is my sense of smell as a deer's, my sense of touch as a bat's – but, most important, I have the capacity to conjoin all this in one point.
> (*IB*, 52)

Clearly the notion of bringing together seemingly distant components into a synchronous whole – even if not exclusive to Nabokovian poetics[43] – lies at the very

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43. As VN observes, this is "an immemorial urge" (ex. [2]). There is an instantly recognizable parallel between such formulations and T.S. Eliot's well-known dictum about the capacity of the poet's mind to "form [. . .] new wholes" from logically unconnected elements (reading Spinoza, hearing the noise of a typewriter, sensing the smell of cooking, and so forth). Cf. ELIOT 1921, 247. One would assume, however, that the parallels hardly suggest any more

core of the author's literary system. This overriding concern is most obviously manifested in the structuring of individual texts,[44] but it is seen to inform also the larger networks of intertextual linkages, effective in transforming the whole opus from an aggregate of isolated works into a distinct combination, or a structure. (As we read with respect to Sebastian Knight's literary output: "It is not the parts that matter, it is their combinations" [*SK,* 165].)

My next remarks will deal chiefly with the latter consideration.

Nabokov's Themes: Thematic Dominant in Action

I shall seek to abstract from the opus a common denominator: an organizing principle, or a predominant "theme", that keeps occurring in diverse contexts throughout the canon, governing the compositional aspects of separate works, qualifying their import, and hence produces an integrating factor between the otherwise separate literary instances. This factor we may call – for a lack of more exact terms – the *thematic dominant* in VN's writing.[45]

The is no dearth of suggestions anent VN's "main theme" in previous scholarship (though we have also seen that some of the author's first critics were eager to deny thematic import from VN's work altogether).[46] Many of these, even quite influential ones, are based on somewhat crude biographic conjecture, and may be passed over here with a mention.[47] In other cases critics have approached the question by aid of various

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far-reaching affinities between the two authors. In fact, VN has expressly announced his dislike for the "mental archness [. . .] so painfully audible in much of Mr. T.S. Eliot's work" (*EO* 3, 498). In a letter written soon after the first publication of Chapter Eleven in *Speak, Memory* (it was separately printed in 1949), VN states bluntly that Eliot is "a fraud and a fake" (*Letters* [April 17, 1950], 237). I would rather suggest that in his pronounced structure-consciousness, VN joins a more pervasive trend, underlying all Modernist writing. A classic account of the Modernist endeavor to apprehend literary structure "spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence", is provided by FRANK 1945, 9. For a translation of the same concern into overtly structuralist terminology cf. the chapter "The Co-Occurrence of Disparate Elements as a Compositional Principle" in LOTMAN 1970a, 335–42. VN's theoretical excursuses often approach structuralist thinking, and I shall try to point out at least some of these affinities here.

44. We recall VN's assertion that he was able to perceive the comprehensive pattern of his novels in a single instant of time (*SO,* 31–2, 84).

45. The notion of *dominanta* itself comes to us *via* Russian Formalist theory, where it found various applications (JAKOBSON 1935; ERLICH 1965, 199, 212–13; CHERNOV 1976, 34–5). Jakobson defines it as "the focusing component of a work of art", a factor that "rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components" (82). This closely resembles Bakhtin's afore-cited view of "theme" as the organizing element in literary structure. Hence *thematic* dominant (cf. also POMORSKA 1978, 383). Outside the Slavic tradition, we find this useful definition from WIMSATT: according to him, prose style presents "the furthest elaboration of the concept at the center" (1941, 11). It is such a "center" that one wants to posit with regard to VN's writing as well.

46. It is indicative that one émigré memoirist labels VN as "an artist with no theme" (cited from FIELD 1977, 157).

47. "The principal theme of [VN's] work", writes WILSON in his well-known survey, "is the situation, comic and pathetic, full of embarrassment and misunderstanding, of the exile who cannot return" (1965a, 6), intimating, however, that rather than from the actual works, the "theme" is inferred directly from the (hypothetical) life-situation of their author (*ibid;* 1972,

extra-literary schemes – whether sociological, psychoanalytic, or philosophic – often producing readings that are clever enough, but that would be better suited to explain an author less openly derisive of every conceivable kind of ideational framework.[48]

On the other hand, in the course of the past five decades a number of more pertinent interpretations have also been advanced. I propose to take up some of these in connection with my own attempts at a formulation.

(i) *The Theme of Correlations.* In order to specify what is meant by "correlations" in the Nabokovian sense, I shall again cite a series of explicit statements, derived first from some of VN's lyrical speakers. (We recall the reference in *The Gift* to verse as a source for "models of [. . .] future novels" [73].)

"The Paris Poem", a 136-line piece originally composed in the early 1940's, is couched as the speaker's prolonged rumination on "the meaning of life": surely the most universal of all literary themes, but also one that finds special resonance in VN's artistic *Weltanschauung.* The proposed solution occurs in the concluding section, of which the relevant lines deserve to be cited:

[7] [a] In this life, rich in patterns (a life
[b] unrepeatable, since with a different
[c] cast, in a different manner,
[d] in a new theater it will be given),

[e] no better joy would I choose than to fold
[f] its magnificent carpet in such a fashion
[g] as to make the design of today coincide
[h] with the past, with the former pattern,

[i] in order to visit again – oh, not
[j] commonplaces of those inclinations,
[k] not the map of Russia, and not a lot
[l] of nostalgic equivocations –

[m] but, by finding congruences with the remote,
[n] to revisit my fountainhead,
[o] to bend and discover in my own childhood
[p] the end of the tangled-up thread.

[q] And carefully to unravel myself
[r] as a gift, as a marvel unfurled,
[s] and become once again the middle point
[t] of the many-pathed, loud-throated world.
(ll. 109–24; *PP,* 123)

230, 231–7). Also the often-iterated notion of Nabokovian "escape into aesthetics" (STEGNER 1966) would seem to disclose a similar line of reasoning (the theme of "escape" being derived from the vicissitudes of VN's own biography; cf. 13–14 *passim;* 1968, xiii). Such readings may initially stem from no lesser figure than SARTRE, who in his review of *Despair* (a French edition came out in 1939) drew attention not only to the "alienation" of VN's literary heroes – a valid point – but also to "*le déracinement de M. Nabokov*" (1939, 61). More recently, the reading of VN's opus as an expression of émigré rootlessness has been put forward by his Soviet commentators. Cf. CHERNYSHEV-PRONIN 1970, 13; MIKHAJLOV 1974, 154–6.

48. Even the suggestion by STEINER to read VN's work "as a meditation [. . .] on the nature of human language" (1970, 124–5) – a much more attractive approach, one would assume, than the foregoing ones – was rebuked by the author ("Anniversary Notes"; *SO,* 288). For two recent attempts to explain the opus from a psychoanalytic standpoint cf. ROTH 1975 and 1982.

The second excerpt comes from the invented poet John Shade, whose 999-line "Pale Fire" is in its entirety addressed to the question of life's latent "meaning":

[8] [a] Life Everlasting – based on a misprint!
[b] I mused as I drove homeward: take the hint,
[c] And stop investigating my abyss?
[d] But all at once it dawned on me that *this*
[e] Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
[f] Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream
[g] But topsy-turvical coincidence,
[h] Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.
[i] Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
[j] Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
[k] Of correlated pattern in the game [. . .]
(11. 303–13; *PF*, 62–3; Shade's emphasis)

Also the short story "A Forgotten Poet" incorporates excerpts taken from a fictive writer. In one of these, a casual fragment from the verse epic *"Georgian Nights"*, the speaker once again intones on the possibilities of a hidden order behind human existence:

[9] [a] If metal is immortal, then somewhere
[b] there lies the burnished button that I lost
[c] upon my seventh birthday in a garden.
[d] Find me that button and my soul will know
[e] that every soul is saved and stored and treasured.
(*ND*, 36)

Now, it is apparent that none of the cited utterances can be attributed directly to "Nabokov". The speaker in ex. [7] is not the author, but rather a *persona* constructed for that particular text. Within the larger novelistic framework of *Pale Fire* (ex. [8]). Shade exists, as it were, not only once but twice removed from his creator; and the epic speaker in ex. [9] can be said to have an existence only as an invention by the "forgotten poet", himself a character within the primary narrative – that is, *three* fictional removes away from the real author. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see that on their respective levels of fiction each speaker is giving voice to concerns that are profoundly characteristic of all Nabokovian writing.

To discover "correlated patterns" ([7e]–[h], [8k]) within the fabric of one's life; to take delight in hidden "designs" ([7g]), "congruences" ([7m]), or "coincidences" ([8g]) between temporally remote instances; or to discern intimations of "immortality" in the recovery of lost details from the past ([9])[49] – without doubt these are notions for which counterparts can be found from most diverse corners in the canon.

In *Speak, Memory*, VN applies the tenet to his personal past, choosing as the main task of the autobiography "the following of [. . .] thematic designs through one's life" (27).[50] In his biographic sketches of Pushkin and Gogol' he again draws attention to

49. We have already noted (n. 35) that the importance of "the past" as a major thematic element in VN's Russian fiction was pointed out as early as 1934 by one of his émigré critics. As the author asserts in the opening chapter of his memoir: "[. . .] probing one's childhood [. . .] is the next best to probing one's eternity" (*SM*, 20–1).

50. The key image of a patterned carpet from "The Paris Poem" ([7e]–[h]) is reiterated here: "I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another" (*SM*, 139). In *Invitation to a Beheading* the trope is used to illustrate Cincinnatus's notion of an ideal world, where "time takes shape according to one's pleasure, like a figured rug whose folds can be gathered in such a way that two designs will meet" (94).

the emergence of "an artistically satisfying pattern" in the studied lives (*EO* 3, 201; *NG,* 25 and *passim*). Sebastian Knight's second novel, so we are told, deals with "the methods of human fate" (*SK,* 89); Fyodor envisions a voluminous work entirely devoted to "fate's methods" (*G,* 343); and also Humbert Humbert persists in recording in his narrative "those dazzling coincidences that logicians loathe and poets love" (*L,* 32). An overall competence to perceive such a-logical correlations is at the basis of Vadim's definition of "genius" in *Look at the Harlequins!*: "Seeing things other's don't see. Or rather the invisible links between things" (40) – while in other cases the malfunctions of this capacity may result in odd varieties of madness: the hero's "referential mania" in "Signs and Symbols"; Luzhin's fateful affair with chess in *The Defense;* Hermann Karlovich's obsessive insistence on "resemblances" in *Despair;* or Kinbote's concern with the self-created "Zembla" in *Pale Fire* (overtly defined as "a land of [. . .] 'resemblers' " [*PF,* 265]). Discoursing on his own entomological pursuits, finally, VN extends the principle of correlations to encompass the whole of the phenomenal world: "Coincidence of pattern is one of the wonders of nature" (*SM,* 157).[51]

Prompted by these recurrent guidelines, we may now attempt a tentative definition of our own. I shall single out as one of the predominant themes in VN's work *the vision of man's life as based on a network of inherent correlations: a systematic emphasis on the interrelatedness between diverse points in time, or a belief in the essential comprehensibility of human existence through its latent patterns.* I suggest that by tracing the particular manifestations of this concern in the author's narrative fiction, also the total system of Nabokovian poetics – as of "life" – will be better comprehended.[52]

(ii) *The Theme of the Text.* The foregoing formulation leads to another one, of no less importance. It will be readily observed that our definition of the author's central theme carries a dubious resemblance to the principle that was earlier said to govern the unity of *all* literary structures. When VN's speakers in exs. [7]–[9] promote the notion of correlations as the key to comprehending human existence, in exs. [2]–[6] an analogous notion was treated mainly in terms of artistic composition. Striving to attain structural unity in his work, the author chooses unity as the chief thematic problem of the texts themselves. Is this redundancy meaningful?

One would assume that it is. Insofar as "the poet [. . .] is the nucleus" (ex. [2]) of all structure-making processes, it follows that life's hidden designs will be best discovered through the act of composing a literary text. This is the other predominant theme that

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51. It might not be entirely facetious to point out that the consistent emphasis on "coincidence" surfaces also in VN's scientific publications. Cf. his rebuttals of Darwinian "natural selection" as a valid explanation for certain structural peculiarities in *Plebejinae* butterflies ("Notes on Neotropical *Plebejinae*", 6), which later recur in an identical form in the entomological Chapter Six of *Speak, Memory* (125).

52. I quote a pertinent comment from ALTER: "The key to any sense of reality, certainly for Nabokov and probably for all of us, is the perception of pattern" (1970, 45). Aspects of "patterning" in VN's novels have also been taken up by APPEL 1970a, esp. xvii-xix; FOWLER 1974, 44–51; and in essays by CARROLL 1974; ROSENBLUM 1978; DE JONGE 1979. Another approach to the subject is provided in the fine introductory chapter to MADDOX 1983, 1–13.

one finds underlying the canon. It may be overtly expounded, as in Shade's resounding assertion: "I feel I understand/ Existence, or at least a minute part/ Of my existence, only through my art,/ In terms of combinational delight;/ And if my private universe scans right,/ So does the verse of galaxies divine/ Which I suspect is an iambic line" ("Pale Fire", 11. 970–7; *PF,* 68–9); or in an analogous passage from "Fame": "I admit that the night has been ciphered right well/ but in place of the stars I put letters" (11. 113–14; *PP,* 111). But the same notion may be expressed also through a gamut of more covert devices, variously underlining the role of artistic patterning in the lives of the author's fictive heroes. While the meaning of life remains an essential concern, it is also indicated that the problem may be properly addressed only within the closed system of the literary text itself.

Hence our previous definition can be rewritten in a more accurate form. In his artistic work, VN is never interested in portraying "life" as a separate subject (he has often commented on the unfeasibility of such a project,[53] but specifically as a store of materials for the structuring capacity of the mind. At the same time, he approaches the question through the precise system of intratextual correlations, recurrences and patterns that constitute the distinctive feature of all his major writing. We shall say, in other terms, that *the central problematics of VN's texts always come to concern also the principles behind their own ordering: the relationship between man's life and its literary representations in the text becomes the dominant Nabokovian theme.*

(iii) *Potustoronnost'/Another World.* The third point contains a correction. That VN's texts are "about texts" or "about art" is hardly a novel discovery. Many former analysts have drawn attention to this predominant concern, and in fact the point was made already by some of the author's émigré critics (abused above). Reviewing the Russian edition of *Despair* the critic VEJDLE put the notion in altogether explicit terms: "The theme of Sirin's art is art itself – this is the first thing one must say about him" (1936, 239). Similarly KHODASEVICH, himself a prominent émigré writer and VN's personal friend, telescoped "Sirin's theme" in a formula closely akin to the one proposed in (ii): "The life of the artist and the life of a device in the consciousness of the artist [. . .]" (1937, 100; cf. also 1954, 252). This particular interpretation – *the Vejdle-Khodasevich hypothesis* we might perhaps call it – has been amplified in a number of later studies, and today its adherents constitute a small "school" of their own within the growing guild of Nabokov scholars (cf. STRUVE 1956, 285–6 and 1967; KARLINSKY 1967; FIELD 1967, 101–2, 315–16 *passim;* BADER 1972, 2–3 *passim;* LEE 1976, 27–8).

In many of such former discussions the emphasis has been on the "allegoric" dimensions of the theme (KARLINSKY has, aptly to my mind, summarized this approach in his definition of VN's total opus as a series of "portraits of an artist as someone else" [1967, 184–5]), but I would suggest that the reading proves useful also in a specifically narratological framework. There are various ways in which the Nabokovian narrative is shaped by its underlying concern with artistic structure-making, and we shall have an

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53. Compare: "You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you can never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable" (*SO*, 11).

opportunity to take up the initial hypothesis in our subsequent chapters.[54]

Therefore, in view of all these scholarly attempts at pinning down VN's thematic constants (the present one included), there is no small irony in the recent remarks made on the subject by the author's widow. Her comments are offered in the form of a Preface to the posthumous collection of VN's Russian verse (*Stikhi* 1979, 3–4). Mrs. Nabokova writes:

> * Today, releasing this edition for publication, I wish to draw the reader's attention to Nabokov's main theme. This theme, it seems to me, was noticed by no one, while at the same time everything that [VN] wrote is permeated with it; like a distinctive watermark, it symbolizes his entire production.[55]
> (V. NABOKOVA 1979, 3)

She then names the said theme as "*potustoronnost'* " (not an easily translatable Russian noun, approximating "the world on the other side", "the world beyond the grave", or "another world"). The term is chosen from one of Vadim's Russian poems in *Look at the Harlequins!* (it is here rendered as "the hereafter" [*LH!*, 25–6]), and as Mrs. Nabokova points out, the notion itself keeps recurring at numerous places in the canon: e.g. in lyrics like "Evening on a Vacant Lot" (dedicated by VN to the memory of his father [*PP*, 69]) or "How I Love You" ("Close your eyes, and [. . .]/into the eternal pass through" [ll. 50–1; *ibid*, 81]); in "Fame" (where the speaker's accentuated belief in an unutterable "secret" behind mortal existence is expressed [ll. 105–8; *ibid*, 111]); or in an excerpt from *The Gift*, transmitting Fyodor's reflections on *his* deceased father (cf. his assertion that around the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev there was "a haze, a mystery [. . .] an aura of something still unknown" [*G*, 113]). With these cryptic pointers, Mrs. Nabokova leaves the bemused analyst to reassess his views of the thematic import in VN's writing.

How are we to accommodate the latter proposition to our foregoing ones? There is, of course, no rule that a writer's spouse is necessarily the best authority on her husband's work (the history of Russian literature is instructive in this respect), but Mrs. Nabokova's observations nevertheless call for further commentary – not only for the critical response they have already elicited,[56] but also for their applicability in their own right.

We should mark, first, that the notion of "another world", another level of existence situated behind the phenomenal one, looms large indeed in a major portion of VN's writing. One need only recall the opening paragraphs in *Speak, Memory*, with their overt discourse on the memoirist's efforts "to distinguish the faintest of personal

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54. In addition, the parallel hypothesis that VN's texts are about *fiction-making* – "metafiction" in recent parlance – has been elaborated by ALTER (1975b) in connection with his more general theory of novelistic self-consciousness (1975a). This is an entirely rewarding study, but I have some reservations about an overly mechanistic application of such modish notions. For one recent example of this – there exist several – cf. CHRISTENSEN 1981. I shall specify my reservations further on in the analysis. Cf. also below n. 65.

55. For a more liberal translation of the same excerpt cf. D. NABOKOV 1984, 174–5.

56. Nabokova's interpretative cue has been picked up by SETSCHKAREFF (1980, cf. 71 *passim*) in his survey article on *Stikhi* 1979 (the sole substantial discussion of VN's status as a Russian poet to have appeared so far); by ROWE (1981, 36 *passim*) in a book-length dissection of "ghost-motifs" in the author's fiction; and in several important papers by JOHNSON 1981a, 395–6; cf. also 1981b and 1982b. I shall return to each of these suggestions below.

glimmers in the impersonal darkness on both sides of [his] life" (20) – i.e. again "on the other side" – and the ensuing metaphor of "the prison of time" (*ibid;* cf. also 105). In *Invitation to a Beheading* the same metaphor is incorporated into the concrete plot line of the narrative, as the imprisoned hero ruminates on his unfinished literary task:

> [10] [. . .] a task of not now and not here. Not here! The horrible 'here', the dark dungeon, in which a relentlessly howling heart is encarcerated, this 'here' holds and constricts me. But what gleams shine through at night, and what – It exists, my dream world, it must exist, since, surely there must be an original of the clumsy copy. Dreamy, round, and blue, it turns slowly toward me.
> (93)

The protagonist in "Lik" similarly envisions beyond his everyday reality a new world: "a world of ineffable tenderness – a bluish, delicate world where fabulous adventures of the senses occur, and unheard-of metamorphoses of the mind" (*TD,* 78).[57] Other explicit instances would range from insane Chernyshevski's self-appointed status in *The Gift* as "Chairman of the Society for Struggle With the Other World" (92),[58] or from the dying narrator's repeated glimpses of another world in "*Terra Incognita*" (*RB,* 119–28), to the quasi-theological doctrine of "Antiterra" and "Terra" expounded in Van Veen's chronicle in *Ada* (338–42, 579–82 *passim;* for "[the] 'Other World' " cf. also 20). A quite formidable listing might be compiled on the basis of all the more indirect occurrences of the notion as it keeps reverberating throughout the canon.[59]

But I would also suggest that this notable emphasis still requires qualification. It is not to be taken in an altogether literal sense. In all its thematic intricacy the Nabokovian production is hardly susceptible of a reading taking its cue from any of the conventionally "otherworldly" issues: "the existence of God", the possibility of "life after death", "reincarnation", or other such eschatological matters.[60] Certainly it is not to be

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57. For a somewhat more detailed discussion of "Lik" in its Nabokovian context cf. TAMMI 1979. Notice that the ancillary motif of "blueness" recurs in several related instances. In the untranslated drama *Sobytie,* the painter Troshchejkin is said to hold in his mind "*mecht[a] o kakoj-to lazurnoj peshchere* [*a dream of some kind of an azure hollow]" (Act III; 89) in which to hide from his sordid actuality. In *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert contrasts "the spatial world of synchronous phenomena" with "[the] intangible island of entranced time" (19) expressly in terms of the azure seascapes of his childhood (e.g. 12, 40, 166 *passim*). For still other "azure" -references cf. Shade's poem in *Pale Fire* (ll. 1–4; 33 *passim*).

58. "*Predsedatel* [']*obshchestvo bor'by s potustoronnim*" (*G* R, 104) in the Russian original. Here the *potustoronnost'* -theme is concretized on the actual verbal plane.

59. Many of these have been recorded by JOHNSON in his surveys of the underlying "two-world cosmology" in VN's work (1981a, cf. 395). He traces occurrences of the theme through a selection of the author's later fiction in 1981b; and an in-depth analysis of *Invitation to a Beheading* in the light of the same notion is given in 1982b. Together these papers constitute the basic introduction to the – heretofore wholly disregarded – *potustoronnost'*/another world thematics in the canon. I shall try to point out some additional ramifications.

60. The "reincarnation"-reading is posited by SETSCHKAREFF (1980, 72–5 *passim*), who draws attention to the quite notable profusion of religious motifs in VN's writing. He pertinently notes, however, that in other instances the mystical intonations may also become the object of overt authorial irony (cf. 76). VN has himself underlined that " 'religion' [. . .] beyond literary stylization, never meant anything to [him]" (Introduction to *PP,* 13–14; cf. also *SM,* 297).

reduced into a straightforward commentary on any sort of "*poltergeist*" phenomena.[61] On the other hand, while the overall concept of "another world" can undoubtedly be traced back to a variety of former poetic systems (there is a ready-made analogy with Russian Symbolist poetics),[62] one does not believe that literary-historical comparisons as such will serve to explain the more distinctive occurrences of the theme in its Nabokovian context.

Rather, we should look for the motivating force behind many of these instances in VN's concern with predominantly artistic problematics. (They illustrate, in BAKHTIN's afore-cited phrase, an essential facet of his "form-determining ideology" [1963, 67].) This is a question that I intend to discuss in detail with regard to the concrete narrative ordering in the author's novels, but I would still call attention here to some overt couplings of "art" and "another world" also outside his fiction.

A quite revealing passage occurs in *Nikolai Gogol,* as VN takes issue with the traditional interpretations of "The Overcoat" as a realistic text. "At [the] superhigh level of art" attained in Gogol's narrative, he asserts, literature is no longer concerned with the actual world. On the contrary:

> [11] It appeals to that secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of *other worlds* pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships.[63]
> (149; my emphasis. Cf. also *Lectures 2,* 60 and *Lectures 3,* 68)

In *Speak, Memory* an all but identical assessment is nonchalantly applied by VN to his own artistic practice:

> [12] [. . .] the real life of ["Sirin's"] books flowed in his figures of speech, which one critic has compared to 'windows giving upon a contiguous world . . . a rolling corollary, the shadow of a train of thought'.
> (288)

And in the well-known Afterword to *Lolita* the formula is amplified to cover all imaginative literature:

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61. ROWE devotes his latest book (1981) to a detailed, if overly literal-minded, search for "ghosts" in VN's fiction. Some of his points are well-taken (some are not), but to my mind he does not make it sufficiently clear that what these observations mainly concern is the choice of the bare *subject matter* in the studied works, not their thematic ordering. Quite a few of the author's narratives may indeed be read as "ghost stories" (or as parodies of ghost stories: *Transparent Things* and "The Vane Sisters" are two cases in point). But clearly their predominant concern is not to put forward a proposition that ghosts "actually" exist (something that Rowe would seem naively to take for granted; cf. 9–11, 107–9). If there are any "deep ideas" (Rowe's term on 11) in VN's work, they must still be somewhat less deep than this.

62. I refer again to the account by JOHNSON (1981a), which contains an altogether convincing overview of VN's work in comparison with the Symbolist poetics of Andrej Belyj. As Johnson shows, the concern with "two worlds" provides a pervasive touching-point between the author and many of his Symbolist forerunners. For previous, more glancing looks at VN's relationship with Russian Symbolist tenets cf. also STRUVE 1956, 284; BERBEROVA 1959, 97–8; HYDE 1977, 130, 197; KARLINSKY 1983, 94. Still, one should not forget that the author was not averse to lampooning the very notion of "the Influence [. . .] of – er – / the Symbolist School" ("Fame", ll. 10–11; *PP,* 103) in at least some sections of his work.

63. Should we add that this, too, is an unmistakably "Symbolist" formulation? One recalls what Belyj wrote in his essay on Gogol': "On every page, almost in every sentence he crosses the borders of what is some kind of a new world, growing out of the soul" (BELYJ 1910, 132).

[13] For me a work of fiction exists only in so far as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art [. . .] is the norm.
("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L*, 305)

Perhaps the most explicit pairing of the two key notions is seen in "On Khodasevich", the obituary written by VN in 1939 for his émigré colleague and friend. Bringing to a close his examination of Khodasevich's literary achievement, VN writes:

[14] [. . .] all is finished now: the bequeathed gold shines on a shelf in full view of the future, whilst the goldminer has left for the region from where, perhaps, a faint something reaches the ears of good poets, penetrating our being with the beyond's fresh breath [*'pronzaja nashe bytie svoej potustoronnostej svezhest'ju'*],[64] and conferring upon art that mystery which more than anything characterizes its essence.
(*SO*, 227)

Hence it develops that the theme of *potustoronnost'*, accurately pointed out by the author's widow, can be understood also as a logical extension of the other dominant concerns in the Nabokovian canon ("all hangs together" [*PP*, 158], as the speaker in "An Evening of Russian Poetry" says). As the proposition keeps reoccurring that the concrete intimations of a higher level of existence are contained in the ordering of literary texts, (exs. [11]–[14]), the central import of the notion is shifted from the metaphysical domain into a basically aesthetic one. Also the quest for "another world" spirals back to the problem of unity in the artistic structure.[65]

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(i) latent correlations limning man's life; (ii) the problems involved in translating those patterns into textual designs; and (iii) the heightened level of awareness attainable through the act of literary creation – such are the closely conjoined themes running

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64. "*O Khodaseviche*", 264. One finds an analogous formulation from VN's early examination of Rupert Brooke's verse (the essay was published in 1922 and has not been reprinted): "*Ni odin poet tak chasto, s takoj muchitel'noj i tvorcheskoj zorkost'ju ne ugljadivalsja v sumrake potustoronnosti* [*No poet has so frequently and with such a painful and creative astuteness looked into the dimness of the beyond/the hereafter/another world]" ("Rupert Brooke", 216).

65. Even "the existence of God" – the ever-present problem of classical Russian literature – may ultimately hinge on the artist's mastery over his literary materials. As VN points out in his lecture on Dostoevskij:

> [. . .] art is a divine game [. . .] because this is the element in which man comes nearest to God through becoming the true creator in his own right.
> (*Lectures* 2, 106)

It is precisely because of this consistent emphasis on the superiority of the literary imagination that one finds a little dubious the fashionable trend of placing VN directly in the camp of "Postmodernists" (who, after all, base their enterprise on a belief in the ultimate *insufficiency* of all fiction-making). Cf. e.g. discussions by MERIVALE 1967 and ROTHER 1976; or the book-length studies by STARK 1974 and PACKMAN 1982. Stark goes so far as to make VN a representative of a concrete "literary movement" (cf. 176) exemplified by Barth, Borges, Beckett, and various lesser lights. Even a recent formulation by ALBRIGHT (1981), pertinent in many other ways, which groups VN together with novelists "[for whom] it is not only the transgression of art into magic that is futile or vain [but who also see] every act of imagining [as] tainted, delusory, a contamination of the unreal" (6), would appear to provide only a very partial explanation of the most fundamental concerns in Nabokovian poetics. "The forces of imagination [. . .], in the long run, are the forces of good" (Foreword to *E*, 10), the author has asserted, and this credo – however unmodish today – is not to be taken lightly by the analyst.

through all Nabokovian writing.

The ensuing analyses present an attempt to study the more specifically narrative manifestations of these constants. I shall proceed to isolate the distinctive devices, to place them in a larger narratological framework, and to examine their applications in particular texts. In what follows, there will be sections, whole chapters, in which the naming and categorization of such narrative figures will demand our main attention, and thematic considerations will appear to be largely forgotten. But it still remains the ultimate purpose of the numerous detours to demonstrate that even the most "technical" questions in VN's narratives may also disclose a thematic sense. Eventually, we shall always return to the dominant.

PART ONE

THE NARRATOR

> How shall we begin this chapter? I offer several variations to choose from. Number one (readily adopted in novels where the narrative is conducted in the first person by the real or substitute author) [. . .]
> (*Ds*, 53)

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A CATEGORIZATION OF N-AGENTS

1.1 *The Agents*

1.1.1. On the Notion of Narrative Hierarchy

I shall begin the analytic section of this study with an exposition of the standard narratological scheme. The discussion will first remain on a relatively high level of abstraction, and it is only after having outlined the general categories that I propose to take up their more distinctively Nabokovian uses. Also the modifications of this scheme in current narrative theory will be detailed in connection with the concrete analyses.

The narrative text, not unlike other literary systems, is understood as a hierarchically ordered structure.[1] This will mean, in the present case, that narrative fiction is taken to comprise three types of agents that we shall call *characters* (in the sense of *dramatis personae*), *the narrator,* and *the text.* In addition, fiction involves three kinds of functions: *perceiving, narrating,* and *describing.* Purposefully simplifying the overall process, we may now say that the world of a given narrative is transmitted to the reader through a threefold set of operations: first, *characters perceive* the fictive world; second, *the narrator narrates the characters' perceptions;* and, third, *the text describes how the narrator narrates the characters' perceptions.* These are trivial observations, but they constitute the prerequisite for making sense of all those more complex instances that one will encounter when reading fiction.

In addition, we should make the following specifications:

(i) *Characters may narrate,* in which case they assume the status of a narrator-agent in relation to the narrated history, while still retaining their role as character-agents in relation to the narrative text itself. In other words, to cite a classic example, when Ulysses recounts his adventures to the Phaecians in Books IX–XII of the *Odyssey,* he becomes the narrator of the histories contained in those four chapters, but evidently he is not to be equated with the narrator of the actual poem (TODOROV 1971, 70–3; GENETTE 1972, 25–6, 48; CHATMAN 1978, 255–6). In an analogous fashion, we shall come across a quite remarkable number of embedded narratives in VN's fiction – Fyodor's "*The Life of Chernyshevski*" in *The Gift,* Sebastian Knight's novels in *The*

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1. This chapter is a revised and expanded version of TAMMI 1983a, 38–45.

Real Life of Sebastian Knight, "Pale Fire" in *Pale Fire,* the cinematic version of the play "*King, Queen, Knave*" in *King, Queen, Knave,* fragments from the novel "*Lips to Lips*" in "Lips to Lips", and so forth – in none of which the narrator-agents coincide with those used on the primary narrative level. The disentangling of the relationships existing between such secondary and primary agents forms one of the first tasks in any approach to the author's novelistic strategy.

(ii) We are also accustomed to talking about *the narrator's perceptions.* In these cases we are either referring to traditionally "omniscient" narration, where the information transmitted about the fictive world clearly supersedes the perceptual limitations of the characters. (As when the narrator in *Pnin* punctuates his portrayal of a nocturnal landscape with the express mention that "it was a pity nobody saw the display in the empty street" [110]). Or then we are discussing an autobiographic narrative, where the act of perceiving is attributed directly to the former "self" of the narrator (who hence becomes his own character-agent on the secondary level of the narrative). To cite another text-book example: the occurrence of "two Marcels" in *Remembrance of Things Past;* it was this narrative device that gave rise to the nowadays standard distinction between "the experiencing [or 'perceiving'] self" (*erlebendes Ich*) and "the narrating self" (*erzählendes Ich*) in novelistic discourse (originally made by Spitzer in 1922; GENETTE 1972, 252–4; COHN 1978, 145–51; STANZEL 1982, 212, 270–1). Similarly, there are "two Humberts" in *Lolita,* "two Van Veens" in *Ada,* "two Vadims" in *Look at the Harlequins!;* this will be seen to represent a recurrent strategy in VN's work.

(iii) Lastly, it needs to be underscored that the notion of *the text* enclosing all the separate narrative acts becomes necessary whenever we wish to discuss a given work as fiction. A non-fictional narrative (let us say a medical case history) does not make the act of telling itself into an object of description, containing as it does only two types of agents: characters (in a case history this role would be assumed by the patients) and the narrator, who is identical with the real-life "author" of the text (the doctor). In reading a fictional work we always assume a non-identity between the figure of the narrator and that of the author. (It is another question, of course, that a case history – as any other mode of discourse – may well be made to function as fiction. This is seen e.g. in Foreword to *Lolita* [5–7] or in a portion of "Signs and Symbols" [*ND,* 54–5].)

The latter condition has been systematically obscured in many traditional typologies of narrative fiction, where novels are grouped into different categories precisely on the basis of whether they have individuated narrator-agents (as in so-called "first-person" novels: *Robinson Crusoe, Tristram Shandy, Sportsman's Sketches,* etc.), or whether they are told directly "in the author's own voice" (*Tom Jones, Dead Souls, A Nest of Gentlefolk*). The practice would seem to find its origins in Plato's distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis,*[2] and it was canonized – at least for Anglo-American critics – in the well-known study by LUBBOCK (1921), whose whole concern is with those methods through which the authorial voice may be effaced in fiction (FRIEDMAN 1955, 1168–

2. I refer to the account by GENETTE 1969, 1–5 *passim.* Cf. also 1972, 162–3 and 1983, 13–14. In addition, one may recall the distinction drawn in Aristotle's *Poetics* between two modes of narration: one in which the poet speaks in the voice of "an assumed character, as Homer does" and another in which he "remain[s] the same throughout, without any such change" (ARISTOTLE, 1448[a]).

79; ROMBERG 1962, 8–9, 23; cf. also the discussion of "The Author's Voice in Fiction" by BOOTH 1961, 167 ff.).[3] The inaccuracy of such reasoning has been commonly recognized in more recent theory and need not be countered in detail here (e.g. BARTHES 1966, 261; STERNBERG 1978, 255–6; CHATMAN 1978, 147–51; STANZEL 1982, 13). It will suffice to state that all subsequent categorizations are based on the assumption that the author can in effect "narrate" nothing in novelistic discourse – he can only construct a text that describes how a fictive agent narrates.

The hierarchic ordering of narrative structure follows from the above. Character-agents are subordinated to narrator-agents, because the narrator's discourse can deal with the perceptions of the characters, but – according to the rule accepted in all realistic fiction – the characters can no more perceive the narrator than they can be aware that they are being made objects of his discourse. (If the latter case becomes actualized, as in the concluding episode of *Bend Sinister* or in *Pnin,* where the hero openly accuses the narrator of being "a dreadful inventor" [185], the ensuing sense of a-realism and parody immediately signals that the novelistic rules have been bypassed.) The narrator, again, is subordinated to the text, for normally the fictive narrator cannot have any way of knowing that he is himself an object of description in a work written by someone else – although it is not difficult to find anomalous instances from VN's novels in this respect too: consider, for example, Vadim's suspicion in *Look at the Harlequins!* that he may be no more than "the non-identical twin, a parody, an inferior variant" (89) of another, much superior writer.

Hence we may define the two main groups of subordinate relationships in narrative fiction.

The first group consists of the narrator-agent's relations with the world perceived by the character-agents on the level of the narrated history. For brevity, the latter will be called *the narrated world* (NW), and the agents will henceforth be designated N and C. The second group will consist of the relations between these agents and the totality of the narrative text itself. In a more general sense, we are here referring to the whole network of operations which remain outside the fictive N-agent's control in a text and which ultimately guarantee that the reader construes the presented discourse as fiction.

I shall now go on to single out some of the more problematic aspects of this scheme.

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3. The same practice is well in evidence in the Slavic scholarly tradition. BAKHTIN makes no systematic effort to differentiate the concepts of *avtor* ("author") and *povestvovatel'* ("narrator"), which leads to several difficulties when we try to accommodate his categories to the present scheme. Cf. esp. the chapter "The Hero and the Author's Position in Relation to the Hero in Dostoevsky's Work" in 1963, 38–62 and "*Avtor i geroj v esteticheskoj dejatel'nosti*" in 1979, 17–180. The Bakhtinian usage is adopted by USPENSKY (1970) – with still more confusing results as his study is in its entirety devoted to problems of narrative point of view – and it occasionally mars even the otherwise very lucid definitions provided by ATAROVA-LESSKIS in 1976 and 1980. It is not always easy, but it will become necessary, to rewrite many of these formulations in more specifically narratological terms (cf. below 2.1. and 2.2.). Such instances will always be indicated in a separate note.

> [1] [a] Three doctors and the Farlows presently arrived on the scene and took over. [b] The widower, a man of exceptional self-control, neither wept nor raved. [c] He staggered a bit, that he did; but he opened his mouth only to impart such information or issue such directions as were strictly necessary in connection with the identification, examination and disposal of a dead woman, the top of her head a porridge of bone, brains, bronze hair and blood. [d] The sun was still a blinding red when he was put to bed in Dolly's room by his two friends, gentle John and dewy-eyed Jean; who, to be near, retired to the Humbert bedroom for the night; [e] which, for all I know, they may not have spent as innocently as the solemnity of the occasion required.
> (*L*, 98)

This is an excerpt from an autobiographic narrative where the function of N is taken by a fictive character who calls himself Humbert Humbert – by the same figure, that is, who is also indicated above as "the widower" (his wife has lost her life in a traffic accident one minute earlier) or as "a man of exceptional self-control" ([b]), and whose state of shock would appear to be the main subject of the cited passage. Continuing in the same vein, Humbert later characterizes his former self as "the distraught father" (100), even referring to a suicidal plan purportedly ignited by the tragedy (99). Still, as the reader of the novel is well aware, Humbert cannot have been particularly "distraught" in the narrated situation. From his point of view the entire accident, far from a tragedy, was more of a godsend, saving him at the last moment from being exposed as a sexual criminal. Furthermore, also the somewhat overly pathetic tone of the passage (remindful of Jean Farlow's "dewy eyes" in [d]) sounds distinctly off key in comparison with the rest of the narrative, and it is only in the final clause that Humbert's own, customarily sardonic attitude again surfaces ([e]).

So what is going on in ex. [1]? The natural explanation is, of course, that while Humbert is responsible for uttering the narrative, in [b]–[d] the situation is no longer perceived solely from his "point of view", but rather from the viewpoints of the five other C-agents (named in [a]) who in their naive pure-mindedness do not recognize the full sordidness of the setting. It is from the conflict between the variable interpretations of NW that the irony in this particular excerpt (as well as in many other passages in *Lolita*) finally arises.

Related play with the narrative point of view proves to be among the staple features in all Nabokovian narration. Representative instances can be found even in the author's personal memoir, where the autobiographic perspective is at places subjected to wholly novelistic manipulations. This occurs e.g. in Chapter Twelve when VN recounts his flight to Crimea at the outset of the Russian Civil War (for the full history cf. *Speak, Memory,* 241–4). A marked shift in the perspective takes place as the memoirist moves from his own, humorously mordant attitude towards the nuisances of the Bolshevik revolution (the mention of "merry proceedings" in [a]), *via* perceptions vaguely attributable to his younger "experiencing self" ([b]–[e]), straight into the diametrically opposite attitude shared by the Bolshevik sympathizers towards the autobiographic subject himself ([g]):

> [2] [a] Early on the third morning, at a vague stop, I took advantage of a lull in those merry proceedings to get a breath of fresh air. [b] I moved gingerly along the crowded corridor, stepping over the bodies of snoring men, and got off. [c] A milky mist hung over the

platform of an anonymous station – we were somewhere not far from Kharkov. [d] I wore spats and a derby. [e] The cane I carried, a collector's item that had belonged to my uncle Ruka, was of a light-colored, beautifully freckled wood, and the knob was a smooth pink globe of coral cupped in a gold coronet. [f] Had I been one of those tragic bums who lurked in the mist of that station platform [g] where a brittle young fop was pacing back and forth, [h] I would not have withstood the temptation to destroy him.
(*SM*, 243)

These examples were included to illustrate two points. The first one, that a single subject may become under scrutiny from several positions in narrative discourse, is familiar enough. (cf. again the classic *mimesis-diegesis* distinction). The second point – that corresponding shifts are possible also in autobiographic narratives – has been less familiar to many previous theorists, who have somewhat mechanically yoked together questions concerning narration and point of view. As this conception would have it, either a shift in viewpoint will always affect the identity of N as well (a notion implicit in the controversial claim by BOOTH that any "inside view" of C-agent's mind "temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator" [1961, 164]).[4] Or alternatively it is said that if N is an individuated character within the narrative (Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* or "Nabokov" in *Speak, Memory*), NW can be presented only from his singular point of view.[5] The first principle becomes impracticable if applied to an instance like [1], which would require that each of the named C-agents be regarded as "narrators": the doctors, John and Jean Farlow, perhaps even Humbert's former experiencing self. The second alternative could not account for [1] and [2] at all. Evidently these would not be useful ways of discussing narrative structure, and therefore the concepts must be further specified.

A more workable approach to the problem stems from GENETTE (1972), who has shown that confusions about the functioning of N-agents and C-agents lie at the basis of most work done on the subject (cf. 185–9 *passim;* the discussion is reiterated in 1983, 43–8).[6] Genette himself introduces the terms "focalization" and "voice", distinguishing between two questions: *Who sees?* (Through whom is the narrative

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4. This explains why Booth is subsequently led to discuss e.g. Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* (N-agent in our terminology) and Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (a pure-bred C-agent) as illustrative of similar narrative situations. For recent critiques of this position cf. COHN 1978, 112, 294; STANZEL 1978, 260–1, 1979, 8–9, 1982, 151–2. Booth returns to his model in a new Afterword (BOOTH 1983, esp. 409–12), but the point does not become quite clear even here.

5. So e.g. RYAN says that any individuated speaker in a narrative "is [. . .] prevented, through his limited human knowledge, from penetrating into the private worlds of [other] characters [. . .]. As such he cannot speak as if he were somebody else, or disappear from the narrative scene" (1981, 528). While this apparently holds true for real-life speech-situations, the rule has been so often transgressed in narrative fiction as to have become practically meaningless. As our examples in [1] and [2] should show, individuated N can always *conjecture* about other viewpoints.

6. Of the previous theorists named by Genette – LUBBOCK 1921; FRIEDMAN 1955; STANZEL 1955 – the latter has recently suggested several important emendations to his initial model (STANZEL 1978, 1979, 1982). It will be seen that Stanzel's basic distinction between "teller-characters" and "reflector-characters" has bearing also on our present scheme.

focalized?) and *Who speaks?* (Whose voice actually utters the narrative?). Only the first question can be answered by investigating the manifestations of point of view; the second one can be answered only by referring to N-agent's identity (1972, 186, 189–94). Genette's analysis of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* convincingly demonstrates the significance of these distinctions for an understanding of any more complex kinds of novelistic discourse. (For the entire discussion see *ibid,* 161–262.)

Such observations do not constitute an exhaustive account of all narrative possibilities, but they still provide one of the best starting-points available at present for a systematic analysis of novelistic structure. This has been widely recognized in current narratology, and during the past decade the Genettean categories have been applied to a whole range of narrative materials. (Cf. RIMMON 1976a and b; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 71–85; TAMIR 1976; BAL 1977, 19–58, 1981a and b; CHATMAN 1978, 151–8; BERENDSEN 1981.)[7]

The same theoretical basis will be appropriated also below, as I shall attempt to classify the separate categories of narration in VN's fiction. I retain the established term "point of view" – synonymously used with "focus", "perspective", "position", etc. (GENETTE 1972, 185–6) – though it should be noted that "viewing" is here understood in a largely metaphoric sense. The narrative perspective may be purely spatial (or "optic"), but it can also be cognitive (as above in ex. [1]), attitudinal (ex. [2]), and so forth. (A comprehensive account is given by USPENSKY 1970, 8–100.) It is not sufficient to find out "Who sees?". We must also ask "Who knows?" or "Who evaluates?", for in no instance can we determine in advance that the answer will bear on the actual source of the narrative voice.

1.1.3. N-Agents and the Text

While it has long been one of the axiomatic truths in literary theory that we should keep apart the notions of "narrator" and "author" – when the latter refers to the source of the narrative text itself – in Nabokovian fiction the same distinction is regularly subjected to parodic play. I shall cite only a few characteristic instances in order to introduce the problem. (It will be tackled in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6 below.)

VN is notorious for his manner of investing fictive protagonists with traits derived from his personal biography. Not only are his N-agents made to share with their maker a common cultural and linguistic background (i.e. quite a few of them are Russian émigrés),[8] common professional interests (many of them are "authors" in their

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7. The second part of RIMMON's paper (1976b) is in its entirety devoted to a detailed investigation of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in the light of Genette's concepts, and also TAMIR (1976, 408, 412) has drawn attention to examples taken from VN's work. I shall return to these suggestions in good time.

8. Even Humbert Humbert, who takes express pride in his non-Slavic origins (*L,* 29), is made to emigrate to USA in the same spring – and by the same means – as VN himself (cf. *L,* 33; *SM,* 309). Compare also the backgrounds of the exiled N-agents in "A Forgotten Poet"; "Conversation Piece, 1945"; " 'That in Aleppo once . . .' "; "Time and Ebb"; *Pnin; Pale Fire;* or *Look at the Harlequins!*.

own right),[9] or hobbies (chess, tennis, entomology),[10] but also a range of more particular features. An all but paradigmatic instance of such jugglery with the borderline between "life" and "fiction" occurs in "Vasiliy Shishkov", where N is overtly addressed in the course of the narrative as "Gospodin Nabokov" (*TD,* 208). In the long narrative poem "To Prince S.M. Kachurin" the speaker announces that, despite his present disguise, there exists a definite affinity between himself and a Russian émigré novelist called "Sirin" (l. 64; *PP,* 139). Similarly eponymous N-agents recur e.g. in *Look at the Harlequins!* (where N calls himself "Vadim Vadimych": a colloquial form of "Vladimir Vladimirovich" [249]); *Pnin* ("Vadim Vadimich" [105, 128]); *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* ("V"); or *Ada* ("Van Veen").[11]

On top of this, VN may also play with various affinities between his authorial *persona* and a host of more or less peripheral C-agents populating his fiction. Franz's recurrent glimpses in *King, Queen, Knave* of the enigmatic entomologists (232–3, 254), tennis-players (186–9), or chess-experts (226, 241); Fyodor's confrontation with the writer "Shirin" in *The Gift* (297, 299); Van Veen's allusions to the writings of "Ben Sirine" in *Ada* (344); the conversations held between the protagonists in *Pnin* on émigré novelists like "Bunin, Aldanov, Sirin" (117); or the occurrence of a copy of "Sirin's *Zashchita Luzhina*" (*RB,* 31) on the hero's bookshelf in "Torpid Smoke" – all such instances imply a narrative situation principally incompatible with our hierarchic scheme. Either N-agents are relating histories in which their own maker functions as a "character", or – which is equally anomalous – they are appropriating existing texts by the real author for the construction of their fictive discourse (Van Veen incorporates lines from the poem "Pale Fire" into his own chronicle [*A,* 542, 585]; Vadim's discourse in *Look at the Harlequins!* is in its entirety based on the same situation).

Such effects are puzzling for the analyst, and previous critics have sometimes commented on them with a note of fascination bordering on awe. So NEMEROV – a shrewd commentator – once described VN as "a practitioner whose relations with his narrators and theirs with their characters are so irregular as to make the sacred 'point of view' emit rabbits like a hat" (1957, 314). Other analysts have been induced to suggest forgoing precise theoretical distinctions altogether. (E.g. BADER dismisses the whole question of narrative point of view as one of the "conventional topics of novel criticism"

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9. N in "A Forgotten Poet" tells that all his Russian works are banned in Soviet Union (*ND,* 41); in "Conversation Piece, 1945" N is criticized by his émigré compatriots for his "depraved, decadent writings" (*ibid,* 111); and in *Pnin* it is indicated that N-agent's works have been previously published both in Russian and English (159, 179). Such affinities are taken *ad absurdum* in *Look at the Harlequins!*, where even the specific titles of Vadim's published novels duplicate those by VN himself.

10. "One exquisite point about [*Pnin*]" – notes VN in a letter written soon after the publication of the novel – "is the little conversation between Pnin and Chateau *about me*" (*Letters* [February 18, 1957], 307; my emphasis). The reference is to the discourse on N-agent's entomological interests in Chapter Five (cf. *P,* 128). VN similarly identifies with the moth-collecting novelist in *Bend Sinister* (cf. Introduction to the novel, xiv).

11. Van Veen's cognomen acronymically incorporates not only the familiar name and patronymic – "V.V." (*A,* 56) – but the actual initials: "V.N.". The latter are also produced by the conjoined names of the two protagonists in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (i.e. "*V*"+ "K*n*ight"). Cf. also the mysterious "*V.*Botki*n*" in *Pale Fire,* or the title of VN's last American short story: "The *Van*e Sisters". For more on such alphabetic name-play cf. 6.2.2.

[1972, 7] that are of little avail in approaching Nabokovian fiction. For related views cf. also APPEL 1970a, xviii *passim;* COUTURIER 1978, 165–7.)[12]

Nonetheless, it will be argued here that the Nabokovian strategies, however awesome, are fully susceptible to rational inquiry. Insofar as we persist in discussing the author's work *as fiction* – and not as a cryptic commentary on his personal history – we shall be able to proceed in a sufficiently systematic manner. From a narratological standpoint, any mention of a figure called "Nabokov" (or "Nebukow" [*KQKn,* 264], or "Naborcroft" [*LH!,* 249]) in the studied novels still refers to a fictive entity, requiring no special treatment from the analyst. Notwithstanding the multiple ways in which VN may manipulate his biography in his work, none of his novelistic N-agents escape their subordinate role in the totality of the narrative text. Even at best, as Hermann Karlovich comes to concretely realize in *Despair,* they may aspire only to the status of a "substitute author" (53), and we would be poorly advised to ignore this axiom in the present instance either.

This is why I shall be insisting all through the following categorization on *the fundamental non-identity between the author and his fictive agents,* no matter how inviting the affinities may on occasion appear.

This perspective will be retained throughout Part One (Chapters 1–3). It is only in the second part of this study, as we shall focus on the interrelations between N and the comprehensive narrative text, that the question of "the author's" role in the Nabokovian opus will be taken into consideration (Chapters 4–6). But for the present, we shall try to remain exclusively within the boundaries of fiction.

1.2 *N-Categories in Nabokov's Fiction*

1.2.1. On Categorization

Divested of its links with the point of view of C-agents on one hand, and strictly authorial concerns on the other, the device of fictive N still allows a wide range of alternative uses. This holds true also with regard to Nabokovian fiction which, despite its having sometimes been characterized mainly in terms of single categories,[13] discloses upon a detailed scrutiny a rather remarkable variety of narrative forms.

Below, I shall attempt to isolate a set of criteria enabling us to systematize the major categories of narrative voice in the corpus. These criteria will be derived both from the already existing typologies,[14] and – more importantly – from the recurring properties

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12. Still other critics have attempted to solve the problem by aid of somewhat dubious terminological adjustments. LOKRANTZ (1973, 10, 21–2) puts forward the term "narr-author" to indicate various "mixtures" of fictive and factual speakers, which to my mind only further obfuscates the issue.

13. E.g. those of "biographic" narration (FIELD 1967, 15–32; GRABES 1977). This is not an invalid assumption, but still an overly general one to tell us anything of importance.

14. Among these: FRIEDMAN 1955; STANZEL 1955, 1978, 1979, 1982; BOOTH 1961 and 1983 esp. 428–31; ROMBERG 1962; BARTHES 1966; DOLEŽEL 1967 and 1973a; CHUDAKOV 1971; COHN 1978 and 1981; CHATMAN 1978; ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1976 and 1980; LANSER 1981; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, esp. 94–103. The overall debt to the Genettean groundwork should be evident throughout the discussion.

in the studied opus itself. Although I have chosen not to apply any of the ready-made categorizations as such, it is not my primary aim, of course, to produce a "new" classificatory system. The chief interest in what follows will be in the discovery of working concepts that can be best accommodated to the Nabokovian strategies.

1.2.2. The Criterion of Presence

Grammatical Person

Perhaps one of the most universally accepted divisions in previous typologies has been that between "first-person" narration (or *Ich-erzählung*) and "third-person" narration (*Er-erzählung*). While based on the indubitable fact that any N can tell only about his own person or about somebody else, i.e. about a "third person" (cf. STANZEL 1955, 22 and 1982, 56–8; ROMBERG 1962, 3–11; DOLEŽEL 1973a, 7–8; ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1976 and 1980), this distinction nevertheless becomes problematic as soon as it is related to concrete instances in narrative fiction. Some of these problems were already indicated above (1.1.1.), but as they prove to have bearing upon certain of the most basic features in Nabokovian narration the question must be briefly reiterated.

(i) If the terms are, first, understood in their literal sense, and the question of N-agent's role is connected with the uses of grammatical and pronominal reference,[15] this will lead into some rather obvious errors. It is not difficult to find examples of texts in which N refers to himself employing the third person. The best-known example – Caesar's *De bello Gallico* – may not be the most instructive one, as the narrative itself gives no clear indication that the "Caesar" of the history is also the historian. (For notes on "autobiography in the third person" cf. also BARTHES 1967, 149; LEJEUNE 1977.) More characteristic instances occur e.g. in Salinger's "For Esmé – with Love and Squalor", Warren's *All the King's Men,* Camus's *The Plague,* or – in one of the shrewdest applications of the device – Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* where only the concluding sentences in the narrative overtly disclose whose voice has been responsible for uttering the discourse.[16] VN's fiction presents us with a case like *The Eye* – a deceptively "Steinian" affair (it in fact antecedes the Toklas memoir by three years), where the standard division between persons is upended through a still more audacious procedure: by having the autobiographic N affect purportedly to shoot himself at the outset of the narrative, after which he is made to adopt the position of a mere observer with regard to the fortunes of his "ghost" on the plane of the narrated history.[17] An all but identical device was applied by VN four decades later in

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15. E.g. GŁOWIŃSKI maintains that it is precisely "the choice of a personal pronoun" in the novel that determines its "semantic design" (1973, 103). The same assumption underlies much of the discussion in ROMBERG 1962, xi *passim.*

16. We recall that in the final paragraph "Toklas" admits that because of all the recounted activities she has in fact never found the time to write her autobiography, but her friend Gertrude Stein has promised to do it: "And she has and this is it" (STEIN 1933, 252).

17. This strategy has been discussed in more detail in a paper by FREIWALD 1980/81. I would only add that N-agent's falsely "objective" position is questioned even through the pun on "Eye/I" implanted into the English title. When N asserts that his only vocation is "to observe, to spy, to watch, [. . .] to be nothing but a big, [. . .] unblinking eye" (*E*, 106), it is at the same time signalled behind his back that one's self is hardly to be shed through a mere change of the pronoun.

Transparent Things, and more local play with pronouns occurs also in *Lolita* (cf. above ex. [1]), *Speak, Memory* (ex. [2]), and a whole host of other works by the author. In none of these does the alternation in grammatical forms affect N-agent's identity, although it normally does bring about a change in point of view (see the previous commentary on exs. [1] and [2]).

It would be equally easy to list any number of texts that do not represent "first-person" narration in the traditional classificatory sense, but in which N nevertheless refers to himself in the first person. The device of the intrusive, self-advertising N is familiar from the history of the novel (Fielding's *Tom Jones,* Gogol's *Dead Souls,* and related strategies are seen to constitute a regular feature in VN's work, where seemingly the most impersonal act of telling may turn upon itself and its underlying motivations. In the opening paragraph of *Laughter in the Dark* the otherwise anonymous N announces – with an unmistakably Gogolian intonation – that had he wished he might just as well have refrained from the narrative act altogether:[18]

> [3] This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling [. . .]
> (5)

(ii) If we, on the other hand, base this division on the fact whether N is concretely telling about his own self – i.e. whether he is "present" as one of the individuated C-agents on NW-plane (which applies with equal right to *Remembrance of Things Past* as to Stein's Toklas memoir) – or whether he is totally "absent" (*Laughter in the Dark*), and name the respective groups as "first-person" and "third-person" narratives, this will avoid the first error. (This is how the notions have been used by many current theorists who are well aware of their imprecision, but who do not wish to shed the established terms. Cf. ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1976, 344; COHN 1978, 272–3; STANZEL 1982, 4–5, 48–9, 90 *passim.*)

As such, however, the distinction appears trivial, calling for a number of qualifications.[19]

The Categories of N_I and N_E

Proceeding from the latter consideration, we shall distinguish between *intrinsic narrators* (N_I) – N-agents who are intrinsic, that is, with regard to the narrated history – and *extrinsic narrators* (N_E), who exist only on the level on which the history is produced

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18. Such instances well demonstrate the accuracy of GENETTE's observation that "every narrating is, by definition, [. . .] presented in the first person" (1972, 244; cf. also 1983, 64–73): the actual difference resides in the fact whether N-agent's person is overtly referred to (as in *Laughter in the Dark,* Fielding, or Gogol') or not (as is usual with e.g. Chekhov's stories). For other approaches to the question cf. also TAMIR 1976, 415–16; STERNBERG 1978, 279.

19. This is why one does not know what exactly to make of the assertion in BODENSTEIN (1977, 248–9) that there are six novels by VN (plus nineteen stories) which are "told in the first person". It is further claimed that five novels are "in the third person" (which also applies to ten stories), while six novels (and again nineteen stories) are said to have "an omniscient narrator". As these figures are nowhere specified with references to actual texts, one finds it impossible to verify them here. It will be noticed, in any instance, that Bodenstein's tabulation differs quite radically from the one presented below. Somewhat more pertinent comments on the uses of N-categories in Nabokovian fiction are given by COUTURIER 1979, 23, 39 and FREIWALD 1980/81, 112–14, but these concern only a limited portion of the corpus.

(cf. also GENETTE 1972, 243–52). Formulating the same distinction in different terms, we may say that in the first case the bond between N and NW is primarily mnemonic: N_I either directly "remembers" his own past (as in Proust's work), or reconstructs the history on the basis of authentic reports given to him by other C-agents (a device favored by detective-novelists and often parodically applied by VN). In such instances we may therefore talk of a *memoiristic* narrative situation (cf. COHN 1981, 164). In the second case N_E himself "invents" the narrated history (as e.g. in *Dead Souls*), in this way duplicating the functional relationship between the author and his created fiction. Hence also the tradition of referring to the latter instance as an *auctorial* narrative situation. (On the latter notion cf. esp. STANZEL 1955, 23–5, 1978, 248 and 1982, 5, 49, 87–91, 105; DOLEŽEL 1967, 547; COHN 1978, 4–5, 14–15; LANSER 1981, 155.)

These apparently elementary categories prove to be of signal importance in Nabokovian fiction, where it is precisely the borderline between memory and imagination, authentic reconstruction and artistic creation, that is systematically manipulated for important thematic ends. As the author himself has asserted: "Imagination is a form of memory" (*SO,* 78). "Memory met imagination halfway [. . .]" (*A,* 70), writes also Van Veen on his own attempts at retracing the patterns of a personal past. "An artist's memory – what a curious thing! Beats all other kinds, I imagine" (*Ds,* 213), writes Hermann Karlovich, and in diverse ways this essential opposition will be seen informing every one of VN's major narratives.

There are altogether thirty-three texts – nine novels and twenty-four short stories – in the corpus based on the device of N_I. Characteristic instances are seen e.g. in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Lolita,* or *Ada,*[20] in *Look at the Harlequins!*, or in stories like "Time and Ebb", "In Memory of L.I. Shigaev", "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster", or "The Visit to the Museum", all couched as N-agent's more or less authentic memoirs. N_E occurs in the remaining eight novels and twenty-eight stories – emphatically so in *Invitation to a Beheading, Bend Sinister,* "A Forgotten Poet", or "The Leonardo", in each of which the invented fiction is literally "dissolved" at the end of the narrative (a phrase taken from "The Leonardo"; cf. *RB,* 24) through the whim of the auctorial agent.

On a very broad chronological scale, there would appear to exist a certain tendency in the author's work to move away from the auctorial towards the more personal and memoiristic: of his nine Russian novels only two (*The Eye* and *Despair*) belong to the N_I-group, whereas of the later English novels merely one (*Bend Sinister*) has a frankly auctorial N_E. In all, seven English novels and eight stories (out of eleven) are narrated by a memoiristic agent. (We might perhaps detect here the incluence of VN's own memoir *Speak, Memory,* which was begun at the very outset of his English-writing career.) On the other hand, the trend is by no means uequivocal. We find the author

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20. I disregard here the fact that both *Lolita* and *Ada* contain fictive "editors" who have purportedly revised the memoiristic discourse. As far as the present classification is concerned, Humbert Humbert and Van Veen will be regarded as the sole utterers of their respective narrations. In all other cases we shall be concerned only with those N-agents who exist on *the outermost level,* as it were, of narrative embedding. Hence "V", not Sebastian Knight, will be regarded as the primary source of the narrative voice in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* and the same applies to such many-levelled stories as "Bachmann", "Cloud, Castle, Lake", or "The Passenger".

experimenting with the device of a past-obsessed, typically Nabokovian N_I as early as in the untranslated short story "*Blagost'* " ([1924] *VCh,* 157–64), and the device recurs e.g. in "The Thunderstorm", "A Guide to Berlin", "A Letter That Never Reached Russia", or in the long narrative poem "*Universitetskaja poema*" (1927), devoted in its entirety to the speaker's reminiscences of his studies at Cambridge (an early version of Chapter Thirteen in *Speak, Memory* [*SM,* 259–73]).

Moreover, there exist texts on which no actual consensus has been reached in previous criticism. *Transparent Things* (an anomalous instance in more ways than one) has been alternatively described either in terms of an auctorial narrative situation or as a variation of a N_I-text (cf. below Chapter 2.4.). Similarly, *The Gift* has been studied as the protagonist's straightforward memoir as well as a pure case of N_E-devices (2.1.3.). My own grounds for assigning these novels into one class or another will be stated in separate chapters devoted to the texts. (For a summary of all figures given in this section cf. below *Table 1* [1.2.5.].)

The Categories of N_A and N_B

Going one step deeper in the scale of specificity, we may next subdivide the block of N_I-texts on the basis of the prominence allotted to N-agent's presence. He can either depict himself as the main hero of the narrated history (as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*), or he may give himself only a subsidiary role (Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time,* Mann's *Doctor Faustus,* Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*). For the sake of clarity, I shall refer to the first type as *autobiographic narrators* (N_A) and to the second type as *biographic narrators* (N_B). (See also FRIEDMAN 1955, 1174–5; GENETTE 1972, 245; ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1976, 345; STANZEL 1982, 205–9.).

It will be noticed that VN's narratives observe in the main the more egocentric pattern: of the nine novels with the memoiristic type of N five are presented as unmistakably autobiographic accounts, and only one (*Transparent Things*) can be classified as a full-scale "biography". With the stories the figures are nineteen and three respectively. Pure cases of the first group are illustrated e.g. by *Look at the Harlequins!*, "The Vane Sisters", "Vasiliy Shishkov", or "Mademoiselle O", while *Pale Fire* exemplifies a more problematic instance: the co-occurrence within the same text of an autobiographic narrative (attributed to Shade [henceforth S]), and one that at least emulates a biographic report (Kinbote [K]), which leaves it to the reader to determine the precise relationship between the two.

The remaining texts fall into intermediate groups that must be separately noted.

(i) *N_B Approaches N_A.* When N is not content, as it were, with his subsidiary role in the history, a curious mid-way position is created between the two situations. We may talk of an autobiographic narrative merely camouflaged as a "biography", or of a biographic N *gradually emerging as the central subject of the narrative* on the strength of his own discourse-producing role. (For notes on analogous instances from world literature cf. BOOTH 1961, 345–6; BUELL 1979, 106; STANZEL 1979, 112; LANSER 1981, 39–40, 159–60.)[21]

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21. Also BARTHES (1966, 259) points out that there is no necessity for a narrative to possess only a single "hero": its subject may just as well be the relationship between the two, equally prominent characters. The observation applies with quite particular validity to works like *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Pnin,* or *Pale Fire.*

There may well be an underlying tendency towards such gradation in all biographies – Boswell revealing more about himself than about Johnson, Zeitblom gaining prominence over Leverkühn, Lermontov's anonymous chronicler over Pechorin, etc. – and this has often been exploited in VN's fiction for comical or outright parodic effects.[22] "In Memory of L.I. Shigaev" opens as a conventional obituary for the title character, but less than half-way into the first paragraph the discourse becomes transformed into a bizarre account of N-agent's own past, his unsuccessful romances, drinking-bouts, and mental disturbances (*TD*, 159–68). This early story clearly looks towards the grand applications of the same pattern in novels like *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (another "obituary" transforming itself into the personal history of its writer) or *Pale Fire* (K), where we observe Kinbote employing the improbable frame of a scholarly commentary to spin off his megalomaniac fantasies.

Further variations of the pattern occur in "Recruiting" and *Pnin*, both of which are based on the device of gradually inseminating the narrative with markers of N-agent's presence, until in the end the effaced chronicler of the hero's life is introduced as a full-fledged "hero" in his own right, mainly concerned with foregrounding his own presence in the very center of the narrated history. (For more detailed comments on such foregrounding cf. below 2.2.3.1.).

(ii) N_A *Approaches C.* When, on the other hand, the autobiographic speaker does not concern himself with his narrative status at all, but rather seems to be eliminating from the discourse every overt reference to his function, a second type of intermediate position is created. In extreme cases (exemplified by Molly Bloom's autonomous monologue in the final section of *Ulysses*, the Faulknerian monologists in *As I Lay Dying*, or Chekhov's reminiscing professor in "A Boring Story"), it may even become difficult to determine whether we are dealing with anomalous variants of N-agents, or – which seems a more plausible solution – with *C-agents conducting the discourse in their own minds simultaneously with the progression of the narrative.* (COHN comments at some length on narratives in which "word and deed coincide" [1978, 173; 173–216]. On interior monologue in relation to narration cf. also CHUDAKOV 1971, 65–7; CHATMAN 1978, 178–86; STANZEL 1982, 61, 146–50, 212; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 90, 140; GENETTE 1983, 54–5.)

To my mind, the most likely candidate for this group would be presented by a story like "*Terra Incognita*", where the protagonist discourses, in effect, on his own death and actually *dies* at the precise moment of uttering the final clauses:

> [4] Everything around me was fading, leaving bare the scenery of death – a few pieces of realistic furniture and four walls. My last motion was to open the book, which was damp with my sweat, for I absolutely had to make a note of something; but, alas, it slipped out of my hand. I groped all along the blanket, but it was no longer there.[23]
> (*RB*, 128)

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22. *Pale Fire* is in fact a quite explicit parody of Boswell's Johnson-biography (cf. the epigraph on 7 and 154, 267). Previous critics have already drawn attention to VN's manipulations of the biographic narrative situation in his fiction (above n. 13). But as we notice this is not the sole pattern.

23. This is not an entirely unprecedented case in narrative fiction. One need not think only of the famous Faulknerian experiment (*As I Lay Dying*, published one year before VN's story), for – as LOTMAN (1970b, 351) points out – the first attempts to describe death directly from the position of the dying subject were made already by Tolstoj in his *Stories from the Sebastopol*. On this convention cf. also STANZEL 1982, 137, 229–32. VN has varied the

In "The Assistant Producer" the speaker is described reeling off his discourse while sitting in a movie theater, with the scenes from the viewed film constantly intermingling with the recounted history.[24] In "A Guide to Berlin" the entire "guide" would appear to be composed solely in the hero's mind during his wanderings across the city. A somewhat less blatantly ambivalent role is given to the monologic speakers in "*Ultima Thule*", "The Thunderstorm", and "A Slice of Life".

While the actual instances of "narrating" undoubtedly remain problematic in such cases, in each of these stories the discourse is still made to carry certain indirect markers of its narrated status. In every instance the Nabokovian speaker reveals at least some awareness of not just conducting a mental monologue, but of also addressing a definite "audience" (cf. Th; *Ds,* 123; SL; *DS,* 141; AssP; *ND,* 59, 64, 66, 67), or of actually recording the narrative in writing. In "*Ultima Thule*" the speaker talks of "transcrib[ing]" the discourse or, indeed, or "narrat[ing]" (*RB,* 167) his reminiscences for a more or less literary purpose. The hero in "A Guide to Berlin" discloses the chief motivation behind his singular guidebook: "literary creation" (*DS,* 94). And even the dying protagonist in "*Terra Incognita*" struggles, up to his concluding sentence, "to make a note of something" (ex. [4]).[25]

Insofar as such references are present in the narrative (a logical impossibility in an authentic monologue; cf. COHN 1978, 175–6; CHATMAN 1978, 182–3; STANZEL 1982, 147, 150, 226), it is here classified as possessing a given type of N. In this, a strictly classificatory sense, VN's opus can be said to contain *no* texts consisting exclusively of autonomous monologue in the Joycean manner.[26]

1.2.3. The Criterion of Self-Reference

Degrees of Individuation

Another commonly accepted division in narrative theory has been the one between N-agents who introduce themselves as individuated "persons" and those who remain more reticent about their narrating selves. Several degrees, as it were, of individuated N-agents have been differentiated by theorists, ranging from the fully dramatized memoiristic N (e.g. in *Tristram Shandy*) and his auctorial counterpart (in *Tom Jones* or *Dead Souls*) to instances in which N either approaches an impersonal "voice" (as happens in a portion of James's, Chekhov's, or Hemingway's tales), or seemingly vanishes from the narrative scene altogether, as has been customarily said of e.g. Robbe-Grillet's novels. (We recall that FRIEDMAN [1955, 1168–79] catalogued a total of eight categories

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device in works like "Details of a Sunset", "Perfection", *The Gift* (Chernyshevski's last thoughts on 294–6), or *Ada* (320), but "*Terra Incognita*" provides one of the truly rare instances in which the character who dies is also the one responsible for the narration. Further play with such paradoxical situations occurs in *The Eye* – where the "I" only pretends to die – and in *Transparent Things,* where N_I is dead *even when the narration begins.*

24. I take it that the speaker is here to be identified with the enigmatic "Father Fedor" of the history (AssP; *ND,* 70). Cf. his overt reference to "the days when I was a priest" (*ibid*).

25. Consequently, e.g. a critic like CONNOLLY (1983, 55) talks of the "first-person narrator" in connection with "*Terra Incognita*". He is correct, but he never refers to the problems that are involved in this reading.

26. In fact, VN often expressed reservations about the "Joycean" monologic mode outside his fiction. Cf. e.g. Foreword to *KQKn,* viii; *Lectures 1,* 289, 363.

mainly on the basis of this criterion.)[27]

At the same time, it has been pointed out by other theorists that any talk of N-agent's full-scale impersonality must be understood in a metaphoric sense. Though the agent responsible for the narrating can, to somewhat modify a well-known statement, "choose his disguises", he "can never choose to disappear" from the narrative text (cf. BOOTH 1961, 20). In other words, since it is the inescapable property of all utterances to convey at least something about their utterer – since "everything said by anyone characterizes the speaker", as BROOKE-ROSE (1977, 521) notes with regard to the Jamesian strategies – no narrative can entirely efface its source.[28] All N-agents exist, at least potentially, within the text, and what varies is only the range of devices through which this presence may be signalled.

Therefore, the next remarks will not concern the question of N-agent's existence, or his possible inexistence, but rather the means available for referring to his person. The discussion will center mainly on the auctorial type of N.[29]

The Categories of SR_O and SR_C

I shall follow CHATMAN (1978, 196 ff.) in distinguishing between "overt" and "covert" N-agents, or more specifically between *overt narratorial self-reference* (SR_O) and *covert self-reference* (SR_C).

(i) *SR_O*. Self-reference is overt, first, when the discourse carries explicit mention of N-agent's narrative-producing chores, his relationship with the audience, or his motives for undertaking the narrative task in the first place. (We have previously seen a representative passage from *Laughter in the Dark,* overtly spelling out one of the prime motives behind all telling: "profit and pleasure"; cf. ex. [3].)

In such instances, as STANZEL has aptly observed, "the process of narrative transmission becomes part of the thematic texture of the story" (1979, 5). The references may be couched as simple reminders of N-agent's status as the utterer of the discourse: "We are discussing the air holes of life" (BM; *DS,* 168); "Let us speak frankly" (*ibid,* 169); "Here we have an unrepeatable individual" (*ibid,* 170); "Now we take all this, press it into a small ball, and fit it into the centre of Krug's brain [. . .]" (*BS,* 197).[30] But they can also be expanded into full-length digressions on any specific property of the narrative. In "A Russian Beauty" N humorously indulges in polemics with the reader on the proper manner of constructing the discourse:

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27. For the basic dichotomy between the individuated and unindividuated modes cf. also BOOTH 1961, 151–3; ROMBERG 1962, 24–6; LANSER 1981, 153–5; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 89, 96–100. COHN (1978, 26) refers to degrees of "audibility" in narration, whereas STANZEL (1978, 248; 1982, 90) marks the same division by "visible" and "invisible" N-agents.

28. Cf. also the statement by one of the doyens of the "impersonal" school, condeding that "objectivity in the ordinary sense of the word – total impersonality of observation – is all too obviously an illusion" (ROBBE-GRILLET 1956, 468).

29. It was just seen that if a memoiristic speaker omits from the discourse all references to his narrative-producing acts, he will eventually lose his status as N-agent altogether (as happens e.g. with Joyce's and Faulkner's monologists). In this sense every N_I is by definition overtly individuated, and the dichotomy becomes interesting only when applied to various types of N_E-texts.

30. Cf. the assertion by BOOTH that "[. . .] even the most reticent narrator has been dramatized as soon as he refers to himself as 'I', or [. . .] 'we' " (1961, 152).

[5] All these are ready-made formulae, of course, the usual dreary small talk, but it did happen, there is no other way of saying it, and it's no use turning up your nose.
(*RB*, 3)

In "A Forgotten Poet" the status of the narrative as an authentic "biography" is subjected to similarly parodistic commentary:

[6] Young Konstantin (to use a biographical intonation) spent most of his time in St Petersburg vaguely attending the University [. . .]
(*ND*, 29–30)

In "A Nursery Tale", conversely, it is the pattern of the fantastic that is self-consciously flaunted by the speaker:

[7] This rhetorical turn often occurs in fairy tales and, as in fairy tales, our young man soon realized he was wrong.[31]
(*TD*, 47)

On the other hand, even when the act of narrating itself remains unmarked, N may still be given individuating characteristics through overt references to his personal background, experience, and opinions. Any mention in an auctorial narrative context of "our huge north Russian snowdrifts" (Ch; *DS*, 153), or of "the farcical accent inflicted on Russian by old Frenchwomen after half a century in our country" (BD; *DS*, 39), will indicate, if nothing else, that N is himself a Russian. A dismissal, in N-agent's own voice, of an émigré belletrist's style as "belong[ing] to the topical sort we all know" (Lips; *RB*, 50) carries the additional suggestion that the auctorial speaker is a Russian émigré addressing the discourse directly to his compatriots.[32]

In *Mary*, a related suggestion keeps reverberating through much of the narrative, as it is repeatedly intimated that Ganin's history may in fact be modelled on N-agent's own experience. One instance occurs immediately at the outset of the novel, as the impersonal description of the hero's cinematic career (below [a]–[c], [e]–[g]) gives way to N-agent's confession of having himself gone through identical phases in his personal past ([d], [h]–[i]). Given the smoothness of the transition from one plane of experience to another, it may be finally impossible to decide for certain which of the cited clauses are used exclusively with reference to the hero and which implicate also the auctorial N – such indeterminacy being apparently the precise point of this method:[33]

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31. Compare also the three-page digression on "science fiction" in "Lance" (*ND*, 161–3) prefacing N-agent's own attempt in this genre, or the discourse on the conventions of "ribald tales" in *King, Queen, Knave* (154; cf. also 160, 220). In *Bend Sinister* analogous commentary is elevated into the governing principle of the narrative (for typical instances cf. 33, 49, 53, 94–5, 128, 131–2 and *passim*).

32. But a similar reference in *Glory* – "Once upon a time there prowled marvelous beasts *in our country*" (4; my emphasis) – does not activate SR_O, for the context shows it to be a direct quotation from the hero's mother. It is not always unproblematic to distinguish between such formally unmarked snatches of C-agent's quoted discourse and properly narrated segments of the text, but for classificatory purposes I have tried to retain the difference. I shall return to this question in 2.1.1. below.

33. COUTURIER errs, then, in describing *Mary* as a novel in which VN has striven for a maximally "effaced" narratorial voice (1979, 22–3), for clearly there is also an opposite tendency at work in the text. Besides ex. [8] other characteristic occurrences of SR_O in *Mary* are seen on 8, 18, 60, 77, 87.

[8] [a] On arriving in Berlin last year [Ganin] had at once found work and had worked until January at several different jobs. [. . .] [b] Nothing was beneath his dignity; [c] more than once he had even sold his shadow, [d] as many of us have. [e] In other words he went out to the suburbs to work as a movie extra on a set, in a fairground barn, where light seethed with a mystical hiss from the huge facets of lamps that were aimed, like cannon, at a crowd of extras, lit to a deathly brightness. [f] They would fire a barrage of murderous brilliance, illumining the painted wax of motionless faces, then expiring with a click – [g] but for a long time yet there would glow, in those elaborate crystals, dying red sunsets – [h] our human shame. [i] The deal was clinched, and our anonymous shadows sent out all over the world.
(8–9)

(ii) SR_C. Covert reference to N may be activated through a wide variety of textual features. If "everything said by anyone" (cf. Brooke-Rose's formulation above) serves to characterize the utterer, even the most impersonal of N-agents will be given at least a "linguistic identity" by markers occurring in his discourse (the phrase is taken from BRONZWAER 1978, 2). Investigators of narrative style have often called attention to the fact that any break in the unfolding of the discourse, even a single extraneous conjunction, will automatically shift the emphasis from the narrated events to the operations performed by the narrating consciousness behind the tale.[34] When it is told in *The Defense,* for instance, that "Mrs. Luzhin, *incidentally,* liked [Petrov] very much" (181; my emphasis), this is not simply a rhetorical turn of the phrase, for it signals a particular choice on the part of N, who could also have chosen to omit this bit of information from the narrative altogether. (The instance is not dissimilar from its overt counterpart cited in ex. [3] above.)[35]

Similarly, in the following the interpolated phrases draw attention not only to the actions undertaken by the literary heroes on NW-plane, but also to the ones taking place on the higher narratorial level, each insertion contributing towards the overall effect of "mak[ing] the narrator as such into a real figure" (EJKHENBAUM 1927, 214).[36] All emphases in exs. [9]–[17] are mine:

[9] 'Oh, my poor, poor, hunted little bunny', murmured Albinus (who, *incidentally,* had long ceased to believe that he was her first lover).
(*LD,* 65)

[10] The word 'boor', *by the way,* was used by Olga on any and every occasion.
(RB; *RB,* 5)

[11] *In a word,* there had been a special magic about her.
(*ibid,* 4)

[12] *In other words,* as he read, he again made use of all the materials already once gathered by his memory.
(*G,* 17)

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34. BARTHES has pointed out that a sentence like "So then, Leo had just left a few minutes ago" contains "a sign of the narrator" (1966, 260), for it indicates that a process of reasoning has taken place on N-agent's plane.

35. Such linguistic markers of N have received particular attention in Slavic narratology. They figure prominently e.g. in the *skaz*-theories put forward by EJKHENBAUM 1918a and 1927; VINOGRADOV 1926. Cf. also DOLEŽEL 1973a, 79.

36. Gogol' is of course famous for characterizing his N-agents with "unnecessary phrases" (cf. EJKHENBAUM 1918a). VN has himself devoted considerable attention to this feature of Gogol's narrative style in *NG* (146–8 *passim*) and *Lectures 2* (59–60).

[13] He was already approaching the end of his work (the hero's birth, *to be precise*) [. . .] (*ibid*, 196)

[14] 'Go or I'll kick you out', said Albinus (putting the last sweet touch to victory, *so to speak*).
(*LD*, 69)

When such commentary on the discourse is expanded to greater lengths, it will again start verging on SR_O (cf. CHATMAN 1978, 228, 248–9 *passim*). This is a characteristic tendency in Nabokovian narration, and we shall observe many of its more idiosyncratic variations in the following chapters:

[15] A woman in front of him was walking along with rapid and light steps. [. . .] *One might, naturally, find random words to describe her bearing, the movement of her shoulders, the silhouette of her hat – but what is the use?*
(NT; *TD*, 55–6)

[16] Dreyer decided he would wait to tell his story [. . .] until they were in Franz's room. [. . .] They were now in front of the house where another good anecdote was *in the process of what botanically minded folklorists call 'exfoliating'*.
(*KQKn*, 220)

[17] She was the daughter of a well-known theatrical manager, a willowy, wispy, fair-haired girl with colorless eyes and pathetic little pimples just above that kind of small nose *which English lady novelists call 'retroussée' (note the second 'e' added for safety)*.
(*LD*, 10)

Extended play with both overt and covert markers of N-agent's control over the invented artifice is among the most salient features of VN's narrative manner. While single occurrences may vary from barely perceptible verbal indices (shown in exs. [9]–[14]), or from more or less standard appearances of a narratorial "I" (ex. [8]), to overt parody and "baring of the device" (exs. [5]–[7] and [15]–[17]), taken together these instances provide each text with a quite typically Nabokovian network of self-referential devices. The overt type is assigned a major structural role in novels like *Invitation to a Beheading* or *Bend Sinister*, the latter of which will be separately discussed below (2.2.3.), or in stories like "The Leonardo", "Lance", or "A Forgotten Poet" (for an overall survey of the tendency cf. Chapter 2.2. in its entirety). Texts relying more on N-agent's reticence about his narrative strategies are exemplified particularly by the early Russian stories: "An Affair of Honor", "The Return of Chorb", "Music", "The Doorbell", "The Reunion", and others. In all, there are five novels and twelve stories with N_E that contain clearly identifiable instances of SR_O. Novels with only SR_C number three and the stories (a majority) sixteen.

Naming of N-Agents

It is a trivial fact, lastly, that N may refer to himself by using *a specific name* ("Hermann Karlovich", "Smurov", "Charles Kinbote", "V", etc.), or he may remain anonymous throughout the narrative. While any overt N can in principle be named (that is, there is nothing to prevent the auctorial speakers in texts like *Bend Sinister*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, or "Lance" from giving themselves names should they wish to do so),[37] in

37. The anonymous N in "Lance" comes as close to identifying himself as he can without actually doing it when he tells that his futuristic hero – Lance "Boke" (*ND*, 163) – should in fact be regarded as his "more or less remote descendant" (*ibid*).

actual practice named N-agents occur only in VN's memoiristic narratives. All nine novels belonging to the latter group supply the speaker with a name (or at least a *nom de plume,* as in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Pale Fire,* or *Lolita*). The same holds true for eight stories (cf. e.g. SF; *ND,* 9; TI; *RB,* 124; SL; *DS,* 143; SLDM; *ND,* 134), whereas the remaining sixteen N_I-agents are left anonymous.

1.2.4. The Criterion of Self-Awareness

Modes of Awareness

The third principal criterion for classifying N-agents, though more seldom treated in narrative theory than the foregoing ones, proves to have particular validity in approaching VN's fiction. Above, we have already outlined the main distinction between the narrative text and the embedded narratives attributable to fictive N-agents (1.1.3.). While Humbert Humbert is the source of the narrative discourse in *Lolita,* apparently he does not narrate the actual novel, but another work, contained within the first one. (Humbert himself calls his work "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male" [*L,* 5].) Hermann Karlovich is not writing the novel *Despair,* but "Despair" (*Ds,* 214), an identically titled work that is in many ways quite dissimilar from the Nabokovian text. Even in the case that N is a novelist in his own right (as Vadim in *Look at the Harlequins!*), his narrative acts do not produce the novel that we are reading – so this reasoning must go – but a purely fictive discourse. Nonetheless, it should be possible to differentiate more sharply between the modes of awareness that N-agents themselves manifest with regard to their roles in given texts.

Three alternatives suggest themselves.

(i) N may leave his narrative act wholly unspecified. This automatically holds true for all works in which SR remains covert. (I.e. we have no way of knowing why, or in what circumstances, the fictive N-agents in *The Defense, Glory,* or "Signs and Symbols" recount the histories, for no explanation is provided in the text.)

(ii) Secondly, N may refer to the "written" status of his discourse, by actually describing the medium,[38] by drawing attention to his being seated at a writing-desk (Kinbote's "shaky little affair on which [his] typewriter is precariously enthroned" [*PF,* 28]), and so forth.

(iii) In addition, N may state that it is his intention to produce not just any piece of writing, but one carrying specifically artistic import.

The two latter possibilities require further commentary.

The Category of SA

When N-agent's discourse contains references – more or less overt – to its written origins, we shall talk of his *awareness of the scribal act* (SA). (This term has been used by COHN 1978, 182–3.)

Such references need not always be as direct as in *Pnin,* where N expressly points out that he might equally well be reading about the hero "instead of writing about him" (26), or in *Bend Sinister,* which concludes with a description of the "chaos of

38. Hermann tells in *Despair* that the manuscript of his book is written "[in] exactly twenty-five kinds of handwriting" (90).

written and rewritten pages" (216) on which the narrative has just been recorded. The markers may also be more oblique, as e.g. in the frequent instances in which the Nabokovian N-agents digress on the concrete typographical devices available for constructing the discourse:

> [18] Leonid Ivanovich Shigaev is dead. . . . The suspension dots, customary in Russian obituaries, must represent the footprints of words that have departed on tiptoe, in reverent single file, leaving their tracks on the marble . . .
> (MLISh; *TD*, 159)
>
> [19] I wish the part of my story to which I am coming now could be set in italics; no, not even italics would do: I need some new, unique kind of type.
> (Terr; *TD*, 118)
>
> [20] We depend on italics to an even greater degree than do, in their arch quaintness, writers of children's books.
> (*TT*, 92)

Or when they comment on the insufficiency of the written medium on the whole:

> [21] I am afflicted with a bad stammer at crucial moments and therefore the sentence did not come out as smooth as it is on paper.
> (CP; *ND*, 109)
>
> [22] She was talking at the same time, so that their dialogue is hard to record. Music paper would be necessary with two clefs.
> (*KQKn*, 173)

With a still greater degree of indirection, SA may be foregrounded through a variety of self-referential metaphors or emblems.[39] Characteristic instances occur e.g. in the conclusion to the fifth chapter in *Pnin*, where a couple of evening ramblers are depicted as making an appearance "on the last page of Pnin's fading day" (136), or in Chapter Five of *King, Queen, Knave*, as "a paperback novelette [. . .] left open at Chapter Five skip[s] several pages" (98) during Franz's and Martha's undescribed tryst. In *Invitation to a Beheading* a direct analogy is drawn between the length of the hero's life and the concrete text-length of the written narrative itself:

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39. "Typographical imagery" is one of the peculiarities of Nabokovian style. Compare:

> How charmingly her lashes punctuated his speech, how delightful was their flutter of final dots.
> (*E*, 56)
>
> A small soundless move [. . .] was continued in a slow, infinitely slow sequence of suspension dots in diamond type.
> (*LH!*, 250)
>
> A last fruit fell with a thud – the dropped dot of an inverted exclamation point.
> (*A*, 94)
>
> A breeze from wonderland had begun to affect my thoughts, and now they seemed couched in italics, as if the surface reflecting them were wrinkled by phantasms of that breeze.
> (*L*, 130)
>
> Nothing but a lone star remained in the sky, like an asterisk leading to an undiscoverable footnote.
> (TE; *ND*, 132)
>
> He slowly unhooked his glasses, breathed on the lenses, his mouth forming a lower-case *o* [. . .]
> (*KQKn*, 167)

[23] So we are nearing the end. The right-hand, still untasted part of the novel, which, during our delectable reading, we would lightly feel, mechanically testing whether there were still plenty left (and our fingers were always gladdened by the placid, faithful thickness) has suddenly, for no reason at all, become quite meager [. . .]
(12)

VN's fiction tends towards self-reference of numerous kinds, not only in the sense of making explicit its N-agents, but also *with regard to its status as written artifice.* It is as an expression of this overall tendency that we may understand also his use of so many avowed "writers" as fictive tellers. This is a normal condition in N_I-texts, where N-agents frequently expound at considerable length upon their scribal chores (as in *Despair, Lolita,* or *Pale Fire*). But the same situation may recur also in texts of the N_E-type (*Laughter in the Dark, King, Queen, Knave, Invitation to a Beheading*), which usually rely on the more covert markers illustrated in exs. [18]–[23]. Altogether, SA can be located in thirteen novels and twenty-five stories, while it is completely effaced in twenty-seven stories and four novels.

The Category of AI

It is one question whether N refers to his written medium, and it is still another one how far he can be said to actually comprehend the status of his discourse as verbal art. We know that novelists have traditionally made use of diverse non-literary guises in which to couch the narrations of their fictive spokesmen: a personal letter, a set of diary entries, an authentic memoir, and so forth (ROMBERG 1962, 33–57, 90–4). The device has been regularly applied in VN's fiction, which incorporates not only epistolary narratives ("A Letter that Never Reached Russia", "The Admiralty Spire", " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' "), straightforward autobiographies ("Time and Ebb", "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster"), or diary-like "confessions" (*Despair, Lolita*),[40] but displays also experiments with the forms of an obituary ("In Memory of L.I. Shigaev"), a psychiatric case study ("Foreword" to *Lolita,* 5–7), a political pamphlet ("Tyrants Destroyed"), a critical biography *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* "A Forgotten Poet"), or even a full-length scholarly commentary (*Pale Fire* [K]).

On the other hand, it is always possible for a novelist to employ N-agents who are conscious artists in their own right, or who are at least aware, in BOOTH's terms, of " 'reflecting' a literary work" (1961, 155). When this case is actualized we shall talk of N-agent's *awareness of the artistic import in his discourse* (AI).

(i) *N as a Professional Artist.* No exact statistics are available, of course, but one would still assume that the number of Nabokovian tellers who turn out to be poets or novelists by vocation is not a common one by modern standards.[41] In many instances the situation is explicitly stated in the text, as in *Bend Sinister, Pnin, Invitation to a*

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40. "I, Jean-Jacques Humbert [. . .]" (*L,* 123), writes Humbert Humbert in his singular confession, going so far as to himself lay bare the conventional basis of his discourse. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his prototypical *Confessions* have been parodically evoked also elsewhere in the canon (e.g. Fyodor: "All this in the style of Jean-Jacques" [*G,* 217]). For overt lampoons of the conventions of a diary-novel cf. *Lolita* (41–55) and *Despair* (218–22).

41. It may in fact be difficult, once one comes to think of it, to find any instances of individuated artist-tellers from the twentieth-century novel. Proust's "Marcel" again provides a case in point. Fowles's teller in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a novelist, as are certain of Barth's or Updike's N-agents. But it would be much easier to name dozens of counter-examples.

Beheading, Laughter in the Dark, Pale Fire (S), or *Look at the Harlequins!* – also *Transparent Things* can be seen as a variation of the pattern with its figure of the "posthumous" teller (the deceased novelist "Mr. R"). In other cases the fact must be inferred from more covert markers: the mention of N-agent's "depraved, decadent writings" in "Conversation Piece, 1945" (*ND*, 110), or the oblique characterization of N as "a poet" in "Terror" (*TD*, 116). In the conclusion to "Recruiting" N actually draws attention to "a novel with which [he] ha[d] been struggling for more than two years" (*TD*, 109), of which the story itself proves to be but an episode.[42]

AI occurs in seventeen works in the corpus – eight novels and nine stories – one of its most obvious functions being to provide a plausible motivation for the high degree of stylization in each of these texts. We are not necessarily required to evoke the concept of the "author" when discussing the stylistic peculiarities in VN's fiction, for in many instances they are explainable as a direct outcome of N-agent's own intentions. (Even Van Veen, the professional scientist, is said to have realized in his later years that "all his published works [. . .] were not epistemic tasks set to himself by a savant, but buoyant and bellicose exercises in literary style" [*A*, 578]: it is from these express premises that he then proceeds to write his stylized memoir.)

(ii) *N as an "Allegoric" Artist.* At the same time, a diametrically opposite tendency can be descried in another portion of the corpus. A number of Nabokovian N-agents tend to overtly *deny* that their discourse is intended to carry any kind of artistic merit. Very typically we find e.g. the anonymous N in " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' " underlining that even though he is a practicing poet, in writing the present narrative he wishes to shed that role: "[. . .] just now I am not a poet" (*ND*, 113). Related denials have been attributed to some of the author's most memorable N-agents:

> [24] 'The orange blossom would have scarcely withered on the grave', as a poet might have said. But I am no poet. I am only a very conscientious recorder.
> (*L*, 72)
>
> [25] I have no desire to twist and batter an unambiguous *apparatus criticus* into a monstrous semblance of a novel.
> (*PF* [K], 86)
>
> [26] Far from having literary aspirations, and yet full of words forged over the years in my enraged silence, I have made my point with sincerity and fullness of feeling when another would have made it with artistry and inventiveness.
> (TD; *TD*, 36)

Similarly "V" in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* opposes his discursive strategies to "the easy swing of a well-oiled novel" (49). In *Despair*, Hermann Karlovich singles out one of the openly novelistic passages in his narrative as "a trick of the trade, a poor thing worn to shreds by literary fiction-mongers", and therefore inappropriate for a recorder who "[has] become strictly truthful" (53).

In such instances the reader is obliged to infer that the discourse either receives its literary qualities despite, as it were, N-agent's intentions. Or – which is the more

---

42. It is because of such frequent manipulations that one can hardly agree with STUART's estimate of VN's novelistic output as containing only *one "belletrist* narrator [Vadim in *LH!*]" (1978, 164).

interesting case – we may also say that *N himself discovers his role as a verbal artist only in the course of the narration.*

The second alternative produces still another recurrent pattern in VN's fiction. The author has repeatedly employed the figure of a teller who sets about his narrative task with certain distinctly practical goals – those of a biographer, a literary critic, or "a very conscientious recorder" (ex. [24]) – and who nevertheless emerges as a full-fledged "artist" when the narrative is finished. Variations of the pattern function prominently in major novels like *Lolita, Despair, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* or *Pale Fire* (K). It informs, in addition, *The Eye,* where Smurov comes to understand that a plausible identity may be attained only through imaginative construction (cf. his celebration of "[his] literary gift" [106] at the conclusion of the narrative). And the same discovery lies at the very basis of stories like "The Admiralty Spire", " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' ", "Time and Ebb", or "Tyrants Destroyed".[43]

It was noted previously that some of the author's more astute émigré critics proposed an "allegoric" reading of his fiction.[44] As KHODASEVICH pointed out in his essay, VN's literary heroes are often presented as "artists", even though this status is usually expressed by aid of several emblematic guises: a chess-player, a businessman, a criminal, etc. (1937, 100). Similarly, KARLINSKY was later to describe VN's major fiction as presenting us with "portraits of an artist as something else" (1967, 184–5). Rewriting this suggestion in a specifically narratological form, we may say that several of the Nabokovian N-agents are in fact hidden behind *a discursive mask:* assuming variable practical roles, even anticipating and protesting against the reader's search for literary qualities in the discourse, they still aspire towards the status of a creative artist. How successfully they are allowed to perform in this new role – to what degree, in other terms, can they be said to take control over the qualities of the narrative text itself – will prove to be among the central interpretative problems in some of VN's most complex and widely debated novels. (For a discussion of *Pale Fire* from this standpoint cf. below 3.2.3. Cf. also the chapters on *Lolita* [5.2.2.] and *Despair* [6.1.3.].)

1.2.5. Summary

The findings of the foregoing survey may now be presented in a schematic form.

In *Figure 1* I shall first include all potential N-categories allowed by the chosen criteria. Not all of these possibilities are actualized in VN's fiction, of course (though I would point out that remarkably many of them still are). Each actual case will be illustrated by some of its more or less typical occurrences in the corpus, and also the principal types of intermediate categories – a specifically Nabokovian feature in the system – will be accounted for. The marking (*) will be used for all non-actualized cases.

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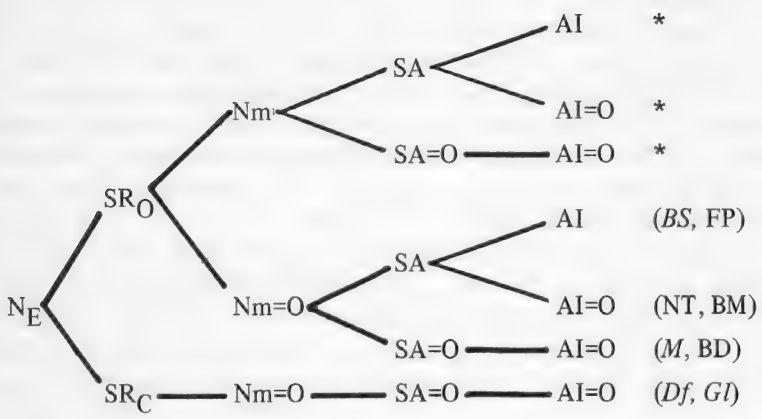
43. Notice that N in "The Admiralty Spire" is not writing just a personal letter, but a rival version of his addressee's insipid novella (the original "*The Admiralty Spire*"; cf. *TD,* 125–6). In " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' ", on the other hand, N is offering his letter to the addressee to be later published as a novella ("I come to you like that gushing lady in Chekhov who was dying to be described" [*ND,* 113]). Compare also the assertion by the ninety-year-old memoirist in "Time and Ebb" that in the end the past holds a quality "which only art could have been retaining" (*ND,* 131), or the realization in "Tyrants Destroyed" that totalitarian tyranny, while invulnerable to force, is best destroyed by verbal satire (*TD,* 36–7).

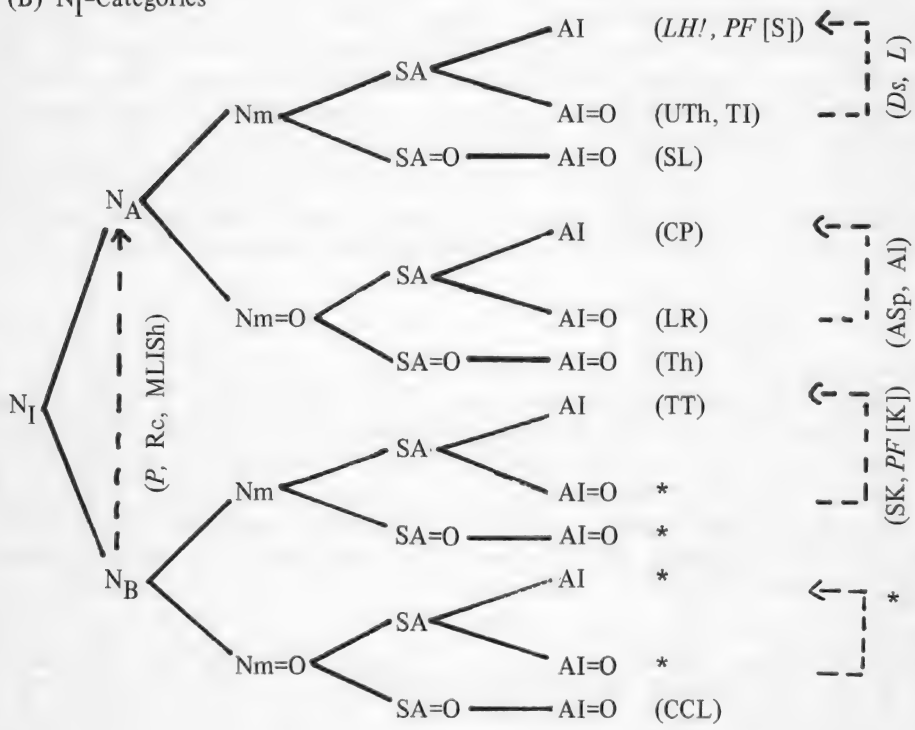
44. On this reading – the Vejdle-Khodasevich hypothesis, as we have called it – cf. above 0.4.

Fig. 1

(A) N_E-Categories



(B) N_I-Categories



N_E = extrinsic N
N_I = intrinsic N
N_A = autobiographic N
N_B = biographic N
SR_O = overt self-reference
SR_C = covert self-reference (Notice that the marking is used here to indicate that SR_C is the *only* type of self-reference occurring in the text; SR_O-texts will evidently contain also the covert type.)
Nm = naming of N
SA = N-agent's awareness of the scribal act
AI = N-agent's awareness of the artistic import in his discourse
——→ = intermediate categories (i.e. the text contains markers of either of the opposite classes)
O = zero

Table 1 purports to list the whole of the corpus according to the obtained categories. While many of the separate classifications were briefly discussed above, several others still remain open to debate. (Indeed, we have not yet even begun to answer the question "Who narrates?" in such entirely problematic novels as *The Gift*, *Transparent Things*, or *Pale Fire*.)

The following schematization only indicates some possible solutions. The more specific lines of reasoning behind my readings will be stated in the subsequent chapters, as I shall now proceed to study the applications of these categories in VN's individual texts. Problems involved in auctorial narration will be the subject of our next analytic chapter (Chapter 2). Uses of the memoiristic type of N will be examined in the third chapter, where also the whole question of N-agent's role will be taken into reconsideration and related to the phenomenon of narrative embedding (Chapter 3).

Table 1

(A) N_E-Texts
(a) Novels

Category / Text	SR_O	SR_C	SA	SA=O	AI	AI=O
BS	+	–	+	–	+	–
Df	–	+	–	+	–	+
G	–	+	–	+	–	+
Gl	–	+	–	+	–	+
IB	+	–	+	–	+	–
KQKn	+	–	+	–	–	+
LD	+	–	+	–	+	–
M	+	–	–	+	–	+

(b) Stories

Category / Text	SR_O	SR_C	SA	SA=O	AI	AI=O
AffH	−	+	−	+	−	+
Aur	−	+	−	+	−	+
BD	+	−	−	+	−	+
BM	+	−	+	−	−	+
BN	−	+	−	+	−	+
Ch	+	−	−	+	−	+
Cr	+	−	−	+	−	+
Db	−	+	−	+	−	+
DF	−	+	−	+	−	+
DS	+	−	−	+	−	+
FP	+	−	+	−	+	−
Leon	+	−	+	−	+	−
Lik	−	+	−	+	−	+
Lips	+	−	−	+	−	+
Ln	+	−	+	−	+	−
MCh	−	+	−	+	−	+
Mus	−	+	−	+	−	+
NT	+	−	+	−	−	+
Or	−	+	−	+	−	+
Pass	−	+	−	+	−	+
PE	−	+	−	+	−	+
Perf	−	+	−	+	−	+
RB	+	−	+	−	−	+
RCh	−	+	−	+	−	+
Reun	−	+	−	+	−	+
SR	+	−	+	−	−	+
SS	−	+	−	+	−	+
TS	−	+	−	+	−	+

(B) N_I-Texts

(a) Novels

Category / Text	N_A	N_B	Nm	Nm=O	SA	SA=O	AI	AI=O
A	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
Ds	+	−	+	−	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
E	+	−	+	−	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
L	+	−	+	−	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
LH!	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
P	−(+)	+(−)	+	−	+	−	+	−
PF(K)	−(+)	+(−)	+	−	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
PF(S)	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−
SK	−(+)	+(−)	+	−	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
TT	−	+	+	−	+	−	+	−

(b) Stories

Category / Text	N_A	N_B	Nm	Nm=O	SA	SA=O	AI	AI=O
Al	+	−	−	+	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
ASp	+	−	−	+	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
AssP	−	+	+	−	−	+	−	+
Bm	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+
CCL	−	+	−	+	−	+	−	+
CP	+	−	−	+	+	−	+	−
FL	+	−	−	+	+	−	−	+
GB	+	−	−	+	+	−	+	−
LR	+	−	−	+	+	−	−	+
MLISh	−(+)	+(−)	+	−	+	−	−	+
MO	+	−	−	+	+	−	+	−
Rc	−(+)	+(−)	−	+	+	−	+	−
SF	+	−	+	−	+	−	−	+
SL	+	−	+	−	−	+	−	+
SLDM	+	−	+	−	+	−	−	+
TD	+	−	−	+	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
TE	+	−	−	+	+	−	−(+)	+(−)
Th	+	−	−	+	−	+	−	+
TI	+	−	+	−	+	−	−	+

Terr	+	−	−	+	+	−	+	−
UTh	+	−	+	−	+	−	−	+
VM	+	−	−	+	−	+	−	+
VnS	+	−	−	+	+	−	−	+
VSh	+	−	+	−	+	−	+	−

2

THE CATEGORY OF N_E: N IN RELATION TO NW

2.1. *ND-CD Contaminations: "The Other" and the Problem of Foreign Discourse in Nabokov's Narratives*

2.1.1. A Preliminary Setting of the Problem

It has long been a critical commonplace to marvel at VN's stylistic virtuosity while at the same time deploring the lack of convincing characterization in a typically Nabokovian narrative. Rephrasing this complaint in terms of our narratological scheme, we notice that the problem bears directly on the relationship existing between the discourse uttered by an auctorial type of N (N_E) and the various "discourses" attributed to C-agents within the world of the narrated history (NW). In a more far-ranging sense, the same problem borders on the famous Bakhtinian notion of *the author's word* versus *the other's word* (or discourse) in novelistic structure.[1] As will become apparent, it is precisely the author's alleged disregard for other points of view, an insufficient understanding of "the other's" mind, that many readers have objected to in Nabokovian writing (a position summarized by OATES in her terse dictum: "Nabokov empties the universe of everything except Nabokov" [1973, 37]).[2]

Though no re-evaluation of VN's work with regard to the standard categories of psychological realism is in order here, I still propose that the question merits further pondering. We should mark, first, that the author has himself often underscored the importance of moving beyond one's bare self when writing fiction. "People tend to

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1. For a detailed formulation of the contrast between *avtorskoe slovo* and *chuzhoe slovo* cf. the section entitled "*Slovo u Dostoevskogo*" in BAKHTIN 1929, 105–241; a revised and expanded version appears in English as "The Word in Dostoevsky" (1963, 150–227). Cf. also "*Avtor i geroj v esteticheskoj dejatel'nosti*" (BAKHTIN 1979, 7–180). I am deliberately employing the terms in their initial guise. The Bakhtinian tendency – awkward for the present purposes – to apply "author" and "narrator" as virtual synonyms has been noted already above. The notions of *chuzhoe slovo* or *chuzhoe rech'* (i.e. "speech") also function prominently in VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN (1930) and throughout USPENSKY 1970.

2. So also RABAN writes that "Nabokov is his own major character: his fictional people make up a paper chase of transparent metaphors which lead straight back to the groaning novelist, weighed down by the world he has himself created" (1973, 75). Cf. also the view put forward in one of the standard introductions to the author: "Nabokov's talent is essentially that of a stylist [. . .]. All his characters must be 'little Nabokovs' " (MORTON 1974, 48). Such views have been anteceded in literally dozens of Russian émigré critiques – e.g. in the assertion put forward by TERAPIANO that *"the inner emptiness" in *Laughter in the Dark* originates "not in the heroes, but *in the author himself*" (1934, 288; my emphasis).

underestimate the power of my imagination and my capacity of evolving serial selves in my writing" (*SO,* 24), he complains, commenting on the facility with which critics have always identified the Nabokovian heroes with their maker. In his assessments of other novelists VN again chose for particular attention their ability to adopt psychological positions sufficiently distanced from those of their own. (Compare e.g. his remarks on Gogol's efforts with the second part of *Dead Souls* (*NG,* 132–8), or the notion that Turgenev's novelistic art is flawed because the writer "was eager to air his own views upon the political problems of the day" at the expense of "keep[ing] alive the characters" [*Lectures 2,* 67–8].)[3]

Elsewhere, he has commented on the veritable "coaching" that a writer must undergo in order to conceive the outside world from diverse positions. Even as a boy of ten, VN recounts in *Speak, Memory,* he was in the habit of experimenting with the hypothetical viewpoint of any stranger who might come to hand. As the Nabokov family journeyed from St. Petersburg to Paris in the early part of the century (cf. Chapter Seven, 141–6), the future novelist spent his time speculating on the activities of his unseen fellow-passengers (144–5), "identifying [. . .] with the engine driver" (145), or even dipping into the minds of passers-by espied through the train window. The latter attempt – an acrobatic exercise in *observing one's own passage through the eyes of someone whom one is at the same time observing* – results in a mode of self-reflexive perception that recalls several analogous instances from the author's subsequent fiction. (This is what also Humbert Humbert on occasion tries to do in *Lolita,* or what Smurov in *The Eye* was to describe as the position of "an onlooker [. . .] in respect to [one] self" [36].)

> [1] When, on such journeys as these, the train changed its pace to a dignified amble and all but grazed housefronts and shop signs, as we passed through some big German town, I used to feel a twofold excitement [. . .]. [The] informal contact between train and city was one part of the thrill. The other was putting myself in the place of some passer-by who, I imagined, was moved as I would be moved myself to see the long, romantic, auburn cars, with their intervestibular connecting curtains as black as bat wings and their metal lettering copper-bright in the low sun, unhurriedly negotiate an iron bridge across an everyday thoroughfare and then turn, with all windows suddenly ablaze, around the last block of houses.
> (143–4)

So also the notion of coaching one's empathic abilities turns up as a small theme in its own right in the author's fiction. In "Torpid Smoke" the youthful protagonist is depicted reclining on a sofa in his Berlin apartment for most of the story, while his mind simultaneously makes efforts to visualize the city through the eyes of imagined "foot-passengers" traversing its streets (cf. *RB,* 28); even "the exhaustive accuracy of a dog's sight" becomes momentarily simulated by the hero (*ibid*). The narrative typically concludes with an assertion of the hero's poetic vocation (33). Similarly, in "*Universitetskaja poema*" we find the émigré speaker – another of VN's fictive poets – sitting in his Cambridge digs and conducting a mental monologue from the position of a British charwoman whom he happens to glimpse at the instance of literary inspiration (Stanzas XXIII–XXVI; 234–5). In "Recruiting" the narrative is in its entirety based

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3. Cf. BAKHTIN's related notion that in Turgenev's novels "the author's ideas [. . .] [are] put into the mouth of one or another hero, sometimes in large quantities, without [. . .] merging with his individuality" (1963, 68).

on the device of having N invent a particular point of view for an unknown German passer-by, while disclosing only in the concluding paragraphs that this was nothing more than an exercise "for an episode in a novel" (*TD,* 109).

In *The Gift* the same situation is given central thematic prominence, for here the maturing of the hero's literary gift is directly associated with his capacity to adopt the vantage points of other C-agents inhabiting the novelistic world. Compare in this respect the experiments conducted in Fyodor's mind during the first *soirée* at the Chernyshevskis':

> [2] [. . .] while the others talked on and he talked on himself, he tried as he did everywhere and always to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person. He would carefully seat himself inside the interlocutor as in an armchair, so that the other's elbows would serve as armrests for him,[4] and his soul would fit snugly into the other's soul – and then the lightning of the world would suddenly change and for a minute he would actually become Chernyshevski, or Lyubov Markovna, or Vasiliev.
> (40–1)

Or his efforts to appreciate his own gift from the viewpoint of "the other" (I shall be returning to the point-of-view technique in this novel in the concluding section; cf. 2.1.3.):

> [3] [Fyodor] read his poem over several times, varying the inner intonations: that is, imagining one by one the various mental ways the poem would be read, perhaps was now being read, by those whose opinion he considered important – and with each of these different incarnations he would almost physically feel a change in the color of his eyes, and also in the color behind his eyes, and in the taste in his mouth, and the more he liked the chef-d'oeuvre du jour, the more perfectly and succulently he could read it through the eyes of others.
> (66)

C-agents striving to enter the consciousness of other characters; N-agents reflecting overtly on their task of inventing fictive points of view; the author himself commenting on his innate fascination with this type of mental play. Clearly, the reiteration of such instances throughout the opus is not accidental. It should direct us towards a larger, hitherto little-discussed tendency in the Nabokovian narrative.

In what follows, I shall examine in more detail the extent to which the overall orientation towards "the other" is manifested in VN's fiction. I propose to survey the range of point-of-view devices applied by the author and to explain some of their thematic implications. It is argued that, for all his stylistic dexterity, VN can hardly be said to *empty* the narrative universe of other presences. Rather, he is seen constantly at work to fill the fictive space with ever new positions, combinatory patterns of discourse, and a whole spectrum of individuated voices.

2.1.2. ND+CD: A Survey

2.1.2.1. The Modes

How is the Nabokovian concern with other points of view actualized on the plane of individual narratives? I shall approach the question by distinguishing between the basic "modes" on narrative discourse isolated by previous theorists. (I derive the notion of

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4. In "Recruiting" N similarly chooses to name his imagined hero "Vasiliy Ivanovich" on the basis that this "blend of name and patronymic is like an armchair" (*TD,* 108).

narrative mode from DOLEŽEL 1973a. Related concepts are introduced by e.g. PASCAL 1977; COHN 1978; CHATMAN 1978, 161–95; GENETTE 1983, 34–43.)

A tripartite scheme readily suggests itself.

(i) *ND.* This abbreviation will be used to indicate pure occurrences of *N-agent's discourse.* We shall employ the term for all textual segments in a narrative that are assigned to a fictive N and which display no evidence of being affected by the points of view belonging to C-agents.[5] This is mainly what Bakhtin called "the author's discourse", and what has since been denoted by a number of terminological variants: "omniscient commentary" (FRIEDMAN 1955, 1169), "narrative analysis" (SCHOLES-KELLOGG 1966, 193), "mediated narration" (CHATMAN 1978, 146–7), or "aperspectival narrative style" (STANZEL 1982, 122). The mode is a standard one in the classical novel (COHN 1978, 21–6), and it is applied as a matter of course in VN's narratives, often for expressly parodic purposes. The usage is seen at its most typical e.g. in the burlesque opening paragraphs of *Laughter in the Dark:*

> [4] Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster [. . .]
> (5)

(ii) *CD.* The obvious counterpart to (i) is presented by *C-agent's discourse:* textual segments directly assignable to C and revealing no signs of overt narratorial mediation. This possibility can be activated in two distinct cases: through purely *spoken* records, produced by one or more C-agents (i.e. either monologue or dialogue) and embedded within the primary level of ND, or through records of unuttered "speech" (interior monologue), purportedly verbalized in C-agent's mind and merely *quoted* by the otherwise non-intervening N. (Hence the term "quoted monologue" in COHN 1978, 12–13, 58–66 *passim;* cf. also SCHOLES-KELLOGG 1966, 177–204; DOLEŽEL 1973a, 40–50; CHATMAN 1978, 181–95.)

For the present, the abbreviation will be reserved primarily for the latter alternative.[6] It will be seen that it is a recurrent strategy in VN's narratives to place segments of CD and ND in close proximity within single passages, as the narration is kept shifting back and forth between direct thought-quotation and indirect narratorial report. The device proves productive in presentations of C-agent's inner agitation (a common condition for the Nabokovian hero), whether this be caused by a domestic tragedy (as in ex. [5]), or a mere sunburn (ex. [6]):

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5. The usage differs hero from the one proposed by DOLEŽEL, who includes within the first group also instances in which "a tinge" of C-agent's discourse makes itself felt in otherwise indirect narration (1973a, 50–5). As I fail to see how such cases can be differentiated from other manifestations of point of view, I shall be placing *all* combinations of ND and CD (Doležel's "diffused" mode) into a separate class. Cf. below (iii).

6. It is only on occasion that I shall be referring to the question of actual speech-presentation in VN's novels. We may notice that the author himself frequently took a satiric stance towards "the so-called 'powerful' novel [with] torrents of dialogue" (*SO,* 43). Cf. also *NG,* 133; *Lectures 1,* 214. In prefacing *The Defense,* he approvingly describes the work as "a dialogueless novel" (8) – an exaggerated claim, but still one suggesting that the main emphasis in the Nabokovian narrative is always on the workings of C-agent's inner, rather than his public, discourse.

[5] [ND] Albinus [. . .] walked quietly to the study. Some opened letters lay on the desk. [CD] Ah, [. . .] what childish handwriting! Bad spelling, bad spelling. An invitation to lunch from the Dreyers. How nice. A short letter from Rex. The dentist's bill. Splendid.

[ND] Two hours later Paul appeared. [CD] I see he has shaved himself clumsily. [ND] Crisscross on his plump cheek was some black sticking plaster.
(*LD*, 56)

[6] [ND] When [Dreyer] went to bed that night he could not go to sleep – an unusual occurrence. On the previous day the sun, under the pretense of a caress, had so mutilated his back that he yearned for a spell of dull weather. [. . .] As soon as his back healed, he thought, he would start to take lessons in the hotel pool. [CD] Ouch, really burns! Impossible to find a painless position. [ND] Wooing sleep, he lay with closed eyes and saw the circular moat they had been digging to make their beach booth stand more cozily; he saw the tensed hairy leg of Franz digging nearby; then, the impossibly bright page of the verse anthology he had tried to read as he lay in the sun. [CD] Oh, how it burns [. . .]
(*KQKn*, 235–6)

(iii) *ND+CD.* When indices of (i) and (ii) occur *simultaneously* in a narrative passage, we have a specific type of blended discourse that provides the chief problem to be studied here. The abbreviation will be used with reference to instances carrying evidence of both "mediation" and "quotation" within the same segment: we may talk either of CD indirectly reported by N ("narrated monologue" in COHN 1966 and 1978, 13, 99–107 *passim*), or perhaps rather of ND "contaminated" by various signs of C-agent's mental discourse. (For the latter proposition cf. USPENSKY 1970, 32–3; DOLEŽEL 1973a, 18–20, 40, 50–5; STANZEL 1982, 192–3.)

The specific markers of the ND+CD mode will be surveyed on the following pages. Initially, we should only take notice of the somewhat problematic status given to the notion of "discourse" in the present instance. Unlike in (ii), it is the peculiar feature of the third mode that the transmitted monologue need not always be concretely verbalized by C. Rather, to reapply the phrasing by COHN, CD may in these cases stay "suspend[ed] on the threshold of verbalization" (1978, 103), while the articulation of the discourse is still left to a separate narratorial voice. So we cannot be certain even when reading the following, otherwise quite obvious, excerpts whether the protagonists are in fact uttering the precise words in their mental monologues. What proves to be the decisive factor is the adaptation of ND to an idiom that C *could* be using, an orientation towards a specific point of view:

[7] [ND] It irked [Franz] that her husband's absence alarmed her. [ND+CD] What in hell did it matter if he were late. All the better. She simply had no right to be alarmed.
(*KQKn*, 124)

[8] [CD] Oh, keep nodding . . . keep playing the fool . . . it does not matter now. He's a first-rate swimmer – that's not tennis for you! [ND+CD] She, too, was born on the banks of a big river, and could stay afloat for hours, for days, forever. [. . .] [ND] These thoughts came without effort. She need not invent, she had only to develop what was already there in outline. [ND+CD] How happy her darling would be! Should she ring him up and say only one word: *Wasser?*
(*KQKn*, 214)

2.1.2.2. Approaches to ND+CD

The compositional principle underlying instances such as [7] and [8] was accurately described in an early formulation by VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN (1930). They wrote:

> The presetting of the reported speech and the anticipation of its theme in the narrative, its judgments, and accents may so subjectivize and color the author's context in the tints of his hero that context will begin to sound like 'reported speech', though a kind of reported speech with its auctorial intonations still intact. To conduct the narrative exclusively within the purview of the hero himself, not only within its dimensions of time and space but also in its system of values and intonations, creates an extremely original kind of apperceptive background for reported messages. [. . .] One might enclose the whole narrative in quotation marks as narration by a 'narrator', though no such narrator is denoted, either thematically of compositionally. However, the situation within the narrative is such that almost every epithet, or definition, or value judgment might also be enclosed in quotation marks as originating in the mind of one or another character.
> (168–9)

Such double-focused narration, in which "*two* intonations, *two* points of view, *two* speech acts converge and clash" (*ibid,* 169; emphasis in the text), has come under extensive study in recent theoretical literature, not only in the domain of narratology, but also within the more narrowly defined frameworks of linguistics and linguistic stylistics. When approached from the latter direction, the question bears closely upon the well-known phenomenon of *style indirect libre,* first defined by French and German stylisticians and currently studied under a multitude of headings in modern Anglo-American scholarship.[7] Investigators assuming this line of analysis have usually concentrated on the grammatical and formal features distinguishing direct and indirect discourse, on the techniques available for transmitting speech records through the voice of another speaker, and on the types of intermediate forms between the two opposed modes. Consequently, while the emphasis of these studies may otherwise vary, there would seem to be a common tendency in them to give priority to the mainly *linguistic* manifestations of the underlying category, often at the expense of its structural and compositional aspects. Or, if compositional properties are accounted for, most investigators have still been reluctant to elaborate on their more distinctively *narrative* functions. (I am paraphrasing a useful survey of the field by MCHALE 1978. For other accounts cf. BRONZWAER 1970, 41–80; DOLEŽEL 1973a, 18–20; COHN 1978, 107–16; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 110–16; GENETTE 1983, 34–9.)

On the other hand, it has also been emphasized by recent theorists that from a narratological standpoint the traditional approach to *style indirect libre* is clearly inadequate. Some of the most interesting strategies in novelistic discourse are based upon interactions of narrative viewpoints that can no longer be explained by aid of a grammatical description. In addition, modern experimental fiction – including VN's

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7. Cohn's "narrated monologue" (COHN 1966; 1978) is among the better-known variants. Others include "free indirect style" (DILLON-KIRCHOFF 1976), "free indirect speech" (PASCAL 1977), and "free indirect discourse" (MCHALE 1978). DOLEŽEL uses "subjective third person" (1967, 549–50) and "represented discourse" (1973a, 15); BANFIELD talks of "represented speech and thought" (1973, 1978a and b, 1981). "Quasi-direct discourse" (VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN 1930, 150) represents an English rendering of the standard Russian term *nesobstvenno-prjamaja rech'.* Cf. also USPENSKY 1970, 31, 41–3; CHUDAKOV 1971, 54 *passim.*

narratives – has introduced a range of innovative forms that were unknown to the early investigators and have yet to enter the established schemes.

The variety of terminological coinages put forward in current scholarship is largely motivated by a desire to accommodate such problematic manifestations of point of view in fiction. "Free indirect discourse", as MCHALE (1978, 249–50) has pertinently suggested, is a more correct appellation for a mode that may involve any component of the text – even semantic "content" (*ibid,* 272–3) – in signalling the presence of a dual focus.[8] By the same token, if we agree that not merely the transmission of C-agent's "speech" is involved in novelistic discourse, but rather an entire manner of apprehending the fictive world, the need for newly defined concepts like "represented perception", or "represented consciousness", becomes apparent (BRINTON 1980, esp. 370–9; for related comments cf. also BANFIELD 1981).

In the end, as BAKHTIN was the first to remind us, "dialogical relationships [between points of view] are [. . .] extra-linguistic phenomena" (1963, 151). And therefore, even though the student of point of view will necessarily come across questions concerning grammar and verbal style ("language as the specific subject matter of linguistics" [*ibid,* 150]), these are never far divorced from the thematic problematics of the narrative as a unified whole (Bakhtin talks here of "language in its concrete and living totality" [*ibid*]). Analysing the vacillation between modes, stylistic registers, and voices in novelistic discourse we are always led to ponder the comprehensive "view of reality" represented in a given text. (For related points cf. LOTMAN 1970b, 339; MCHALE 1978, 271–3; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 115–16.)

2.1.2.3. Markers

In my own survey I shall be availing myself as far as possible of the precise linguistic criteria proposed in previous scholarship, but the main emphasis will nonetheless be on the "extra-linguistic" implications of the question. The discussion is arranged according to a growing scale of problemacy: we shall start with a tabulation of the standard grammatical markers of the ND+CD mode in VN's fiction and then move on to various manipulations of the stylistic, evaluative, and attitudinal points of view in particular narratives. The last section of the survey will be devoted to the specifically Nabokovian applications of the mode, regularly causing the whole of the narrated reality to become dependent on the subjective viewpoint of C.

VN himself once drew attention to what he termed " '*monologue intérieur*' passages" in his early writing (Foreword to *KQKn,* viii). Anticipating future speculations on Joycean "influence", he went on to assert that such instances carry

> [9] – no relation to *Ulysses,* which I hardly knew at the time; but of course I had been exposed since tender boyhood to *Anna Karenin,* which contains a whole scene consisting of those intonations, Eden-new a hundred years ago, now well used.
> (*ibid*)

Below, it will be suggested that while the author's fiction does on occasion present us with instances of straightforward CD (above exs. [5]–[6]), this is not the predominant

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8. Similarly BRONZWAER comments on instances that "represent the point of view of one of the characters [. . .] without being marked by unmistakable linguistic evidence" (1970, 50). Cf. also CHATMAN 1978, 151–3; GENETTE 1983, 41–2.

mode in his writing.[9] Many of its most characteristic problems derive precisely from the tendency to blend and merge together all established types of discourse – or, as we shall presently see, from an attendant tendency to *deceive* those readers who expect the text to behave according to our preconceived schemes.

Grammar

The most concrete and examinable kinds of such merging are illustrated by a set of purely grammatical indices. As these are well known from former theoretic scholarship, I shall comment here only on the following. (For more comprehensive listings cf. BANFIELD 1973, 1978a and b; DOLEŽEL 1973a, 21–33; DILLON-KIRCHOFF 1976; PASCAL 1977, 8–9; MCHALE 1978, 264–71; BRINTON 1980, 266–7; BERENDSEN 1981, 85–7.)

(i) *Tense and Temporal Deictics.* Apart from its most obvious features – third-person pronominal reference, absence of quotation marks, absence of the reporting verb ("thought Albinus"; cf. above exs. [7]–[8]) – ND+CD is distinguished by a particular blend of temporal positions. While in a typical sequence deictic adverbs of time (*now, today, yesterday*) are always assigned from C-agent's point of view, the tense system of verbs is simultaneously used in concordance with ND (one step behind, as it were, the temporal scheme observed in CD). The phenomenon, familiar to linguists as the "back-shift" of tenses (BANFIELD 1973, 11; DILLON-KIRCHOFF 1976, 431), has been suggestively termed by BRONZWAER as the "time adverb metaphor" (1970, 65). In VN's fiction it is responsible for grammatically anomalous combinations of the type:

> [10] Today was only Tuesday.
> (*G*, 37)
>
> [11] Tomorrow came.
> (*KQKn*, 85)
>
> [12] Yesterday he had won his tenth point and today he had to beat Moser.
> (*Df*, 102)

That such instances are factually based on a dual focus is easily seen if one transposes e.g. Luzhin's indirectly rendered musings in ex. [12] into either of the uncontaminated modes (for related operations cf. also PASCAL 1977, 8; COHN 1978, 104–5; MCHALE 1978, 265–6):

> [CD] Yesterday I won my tenth point and today I have to beat Moser.
>
> [ND] Luzhin mused that the day before he had won his tenth point and that on that day he had to beat Moser.[10]

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9. In VN's later novels "Joycean" CD was often submitted to overtly parodic treatment. That "Interior Monologue [. . .] was invented by Tolstoy, a Russian, long before James Joyce" is underlined by the author also in his lecture course on the novel (*Lectures 2*, 182), and – ludicrously – the literary historical point finds its way even into one of the authentic monologues in his own novels. "She walked to the end of the platform in Tolstoy's novel [. . .] poor Stream of Consciousness, *marée noire* by now" (299–300), writes Van Veen in *Ada* (cf. also 61; plus *SK*, 52, 180–3; *L*, 119–20). The stylized and parodic quality of Nabokovian "*monologue intérieur*" has been taken up also in the study by COUTURIER 1979, 63–74. This is to my knowledge the sole study where more detailed attention has been given to the use of narrative modes in VN's writing. Cf. also Couturier's comments on ND+CD in 1978, 176–7.

10. The situation would be less obvious in studying the original Russian novels, where the grammatical borderline between separate modes is not always clearly demarcated in the text.

(ii) *Spatial Deictics.* The same rule applies to combinations of tense forms with deictic adverbs of place (*here, there*), demonstrative pronouns (*this, that*), or the definite article. Such pairings are given a poignantly concrete sense in *Invitation to a Beheading*, where they are regularly used to accentuate the thematic opposition between the hero's imprisonment (emblematized by the recurrent "here") and his reflections upon the "other world" beyond his present existence (i.e. "there").[11] We notice that even otherwise wholly solid blocks of ND may become momentarily invaded by Cincinnatus's sense of being entrapped by his mortal existence. I emphasize the contaminated segments:

> [13] The subject will now be the precious quality of Cincinnatus; his fleshy incompleteness; the fact that the greater part of him was in a quite different place, *while only an insignificant portion of it was wandering, perplexed, here* –
> (120)
>
> [14] [Cincinnatus] suddenly noticed the expression in Celia C.'s eyes – just for an instant, an instant – but it was as if something real, unquestionable (*in this world, where everything was subject to question*), had passed through, as if a corner of *this horrible life* had curled up, and there was a glimpse of the lining.
> (136)

(iii) *Intonation.* In an analogous fashion, while a textual segment may in other ways carry all formal indices of ND, it can still contain various expressive "intonations" belonging to C. (The term is taken from VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN 1930, 165, 169; for another approach to the question cf. MCHALE 1978, 266–7.)

Such instances, we recall, were sometimes misconstrued by early investigators of *style indirect libre* as deriving directly from "the author", who was supposed to be voicing his own sentiments through the medium of the narrative (PASCAL 1977, 13). The danger is inherent also in VN's fiction: one reviewer has already fallen prey to his own sarcasm in citing exclamations like "How long ago it all seemed! " or "What bliss it had been" from "Music" as suggestive of stylistic awkwardness on part of "the master illusionist" himself (KENNER 1975, 21). It should be obvious that the awkwardness originates solely in the mind of the fictive hero, whose state of excitement is being carefully mimicked by the narrative:

> [15] How long ago it all seemed! He had fallen madly in love with her one sultry evening, under a swooning sky, on the terrace of the tennis-club pavilion, and a month later, on their wedding night, it rained so hard you could not hear the sea. What bliss it had been.
> (Mus; *TD*, 64)

Similarly it is Ganin who waxes somewhat comically sentimental in *Mary,* not the auctorial N (and even less "the author"), who merely keeps transmitting the sentiments: "Her dear, dear Tartar eyes glided near his face, her white dress seemed to shimmer in

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This is a common feature of Russian literary language; cf. VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN 1930, 159. So ex. [12] reads in the original: "*vchera sdelan desjatyj punkt, segodnja predstoit vyigrat' u Mozera*" (*Df* R, 114), which could just as well be a direct quotation from CD. Both [10] and [11], for their part, observe the standard pattern of ND+CD (cf. *G* R, 38; *KQKn* R, 84). The correspondences between VN's Russian and English prose with regard to narrative modes might provide a worthy topic for a linguistically-based analysis. It has not been treated in the contrastive studies by GRAYSON 1977 or PROFFER 1970.

11. This aspect of the novel has been delineated in detail by JOHNSON 1982b, esp. 85–93.

the dark – and oh, God, that fragrance of hers, incomprehensible, unique in the world!" (73; cf. also 90, 102). The same is true of the interpolated exclamations in "Cloud, Castle, Lake" (Vasili Ivanovich's mental addresses to his beloved; *ND*, 91, 93, 95), "The Reunion" (*DS*, 127, 129), or *Invitation to a Beheading* (cf. the refrain-like "O horrible" and related instances on 12, 19, 20, 50, 74, 155 *passim*).[12]

In *King, Queen, Knave* exclamatory intonations are used in an obviously ironic sense, to lampoon Franz – the prototypic philistine – whose mental monologues are automatically stimulated at any prospect of material possession:

> [16] Only one thing really told him he was in the metropolis: some strollers wore marvellous clothes! [. . .] The hats, too, were splendid, and the flamboyant ties; and the girls, the girls. Kind Dreyer!
> (46)
>
> [17] Once, in a particularly benevolent moment. Dreyer gave him some extra cash from his waistcoat pocket (real green dollars!).
> (12)

Also interrogative constructions may function in the role of formal ND+CD markers:

> [18] She made another effort and remembered that Dreyer was sitting in his desk and showing Willy – what? a revolver!
> (*ibid*, 183)

Or plain tautology:

> [19] Krug moved his fingers – the numbness was gradually passing away. As calmly as possible. As calmly as possible, he again appealed to Mariette.
> (*BS*, 180)
>
> [20] He had a throbbing headache. [. . .] The dull throbs were saying: one, one, one, never reaching two, never. Of the four doors at the cardinal points of the circular room, only one, one, one was unlocked.
> (*ibid*, 188)

(iv) *Lexical Fillers.* Lastly, if somewhat paradoxically, a range of lexical items may be used in signalling a shift from ND into a mimicry of C-agent's unverbalized train of thought.[13] Typical instances are produced by interpolated affirmations (cf. BRONZWAER 1970, 49–50; PASCAL 1977, 39–40; MCHALE 1978, 269–70):

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12. The device is laid bare when the "intonations" are marked by typographical means. In *Pnin* italics are used to isolate the psychoterapist's banal howl from straightforward ND:
> Nothing of the slightest interest to therapists could Victor be made to discover in those beautiful, *beautiful* Rorschach ink blots.
> (91; emphasis in the text)

Similarly:
> Having finished her coffee and rinsed her cup in the kitchen (while not paying any attention *whatsoever* to the presence of Frau Schwartz), Eugenia Isakovna [. . .] went out.
> (BN; *RB*, 39; emphasis as above)

Cf. also the Russian original: "[. . .] *ne obrashchaja pri etom ni-ka-ko-go vnimanija na frau Shvarc* [. . .]" (BN R; *Sogl*, 247).

13. The paradox is pointed out by VN himself in his lecture on *Ulysses:* "Obviously we do not think in words – we think also in images [. . .] we must not see the stream of consciousness as rendered by Joyce a natural event" (*Lectures I*, 363).

[21] Yes, it was autumn!
(*G*, 66)

[22] Yes, he saw himself as a stern plebeian.
(Cr; *RB*, 256)

[23] He put on his wristwatch and pocketed the alarm clock. Yes, it was time to leave for the station.
(*KQKn*, 229)

Interpolated negations:

[24] The mysterious pursuit had been left far behind. You wouldn't catch him now. Oh no.[14]
(*Df*, 112)

Or other fillers:

[25] The wallet was there all right, firm and warm.
(*KQKn*, 3)

[26] Oh well, he would decide when the time came.
(AffH; *RB*, 102)

[27] And now, in 1925, at the onset of old age, this prosperous and on the whole very lonely person experienced such an attack of writer's itch, such a longing – oh, not for fame, but simply for some warmth and heed on the part of the readerdom – that he resolved to let himself go [. . .]
(Lips; *RB*, 49)

In many instances such items may be indistinguishable from standard narratorial self-reference on purely formal grounds, and it is only from clues in the immediate context that we are able to determine whether the discourse should be assigned to N or C (MCHALE 1978, 267–9; COHN 1978, 106–7; BERENDSEN 1981, 87–8). So e.g. in ex. [28] it is Ganin, again, who experiences the "strangeness" of the recounted events, for the narrative that follows is wholly concerned with his own attempts to mentally evoke his past romance. The emphases indicate qualifiers attributable to the hero's, rather than N-agent's, mind:

[28] *Strange to say* he could not remember exactly when he had first seen her. *Perhaps* at a charity concert staged in a barn on the borders of his parents' estate. *Perhaps, though,* he had caught a glimpse of her even before that. [. . .] Now Ganin racked his memory in vain; he *just* could not picture their first meeting.
(*M*, 44; my emphases)

Idiom

Under the heading of "idiom" we should classify not only standard grammatical indices, but also a gamut of more subjective features in C-agent's discourse. (USPENSKY talks here of a "phraseological point of view" [1970, 17 ff.]; cf. also COHN on "stylistic contagion" [1978, 32–3]; MCHALE 1978, 269–72; STANZEL 1982, 194–6.) VN turns out to have a finely tuned ear for various kinds of idiomatic – and not so idiomatic – discourse in his writing. These may function as a source for predominantly verbal effects, punning and "local color", as well as in the role of more distinctively narrative and compositional devices. Two types of markers are taken up in this connection.

14. This, incidentally, would seem to disprove the assertion in BANFIELD 1978b, 422 – reiterated by BRINTON 1980, 365 and BERENDSEN 1981, 85–6 – that ND+CD does not allow the second person. It does when "you" is given a purely rhetorical role as in ex. [24].

(i) *Polylingualisms and Malapropisms.* The function of phraseological devices in VN's prose was misunderstood by those early critics who charged the author with "[an] irritating tendency to strew his text with unnecessary French phrases" (LAWRENSON 1960, 73; cf. also WILSON 1972, 237), commented on his addiction to unidiomatic vocabulary (even in an otherwise perceptive stylistic account by PROFFER 1968a, 100; cf. also 81–2), or blandly attributed any malapropism in his novels to an incomplete command of the author's second language (e.g. in the linguistic analysis by STRAINCHAMPS 1961). Even while there is occasional incertainty in VN's privately-used English,[15] it is more often than not that such lapses are manipulated by the author for the express purpose of actualizing *a given point of view.* The strategy pervades the discourse of several Nabokovian N-agents (e.g. the linguistic oddities and "unnecessary French phrases" in Humbert Humbert's or Van Veen's narratives), and it keeps reoccurring in combinations of CD with indirect narration.

An obvious instance of the latter is seen in "The Assistant Producer", where the cinema-watching N spices his discourse with examples of broken English derived from the émigré hero.

> [29] [ND] Golubkov was not only a very versatile spy [. . .]; he was also an exceedingly ambitious little fellow. Why the vision of presiding over an organization that was but a sunset behind a cemetery happened to be so dear to him is a conundrum only for those who have no hobbies or passions. [ND+CD] He wanted it velly velly badly – that is all. (AssP; *NS,* 84; the instance was perhaps judged an overly obvious one by the author, for it was corrected in all later editions; cf. *ND,* 63.)

The same device[16] is put to sustained use in *Pnin,* where linguistic evidence of the hero's Slavic background is interspersed throughout a large portion of the narrative.[17] Pnin is depicted "cross[ing] his legs *po amerikanski* (the American way)" (33), "pick[ing] up his *portfel'* (briefcase)" (65), and wearing rubber gloves so as to avoid "being stung by the *amerikanski* electricity" (77). He travels to deliver a lecture "two hundred versts west of Waindell" (8), and his new house turns out to have "a frontage of about fifty arshins" (145).[18] Compare these punning emulations of Pnin's idiosyncratic pronunciation:

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15. The author's published correspondence reveals that after his emigration to USA he sometimes lapsed into spellings like "Octobre" (*Letters* [April 29, 1941], 44) or "desastre" (*ibid* [December 2, 1944], 145). VN was himself half-jokingly referring to his "pigeon-English" as late as in 1943 (*ibid* [March 7, 1943], 96).

16. Humbert uses it when he simulates in his narrative the farcical French accents encountered during his sojourn in USA: "*Bonzhur* Charlotte" (*L,* 240); "*Ne montrez pas vos zhambes*" (45, 185); "Maffy On Say" (229) for *'ma fiancée'*, and so forth. John Shade also draws attention to Americanized pronunciations: "[. . .] some phony modern poem that was said/ in English Lit to be a document/'Engazhay and compelling' [. . .]" ("Pale Fire", ll. 376–8; *PF,* 46). Van Veen, on the other hand, punningly toys with a Russian's mispronounced *contretemps:* "*kontretan*" (*A,* 237).

17. For other remarks on Russian elements in *Pnin* see ROWE 1971a, 32 and STUART 1978, 136–7. Cf. also the chapter on the novel in HYDE 1977, 149–66.

18. Fifty arshins approximates forty yards. Notice that in the English version of *The Gift,* where it is not equally important to underline the opposition between the hero and his cultural-linguistic surroundings, the original Russian "*za neskol'ko sazhenej*" (*G* R, 64) is quietly revised into "some yards [not 'sazhens'] away" (*G,* 58).

[30] The rooms of his Waindell period looked especially trim in comparison with one he had in uptown New York, midway between *Tsentral Park* and *Reeverside.*
(62; my emphases)

[31] After dinner a game of croquet was suggested. [. . .] Pnin [. . .] *teemed*[19] with Madame Bolotov.
(130; emphasis as above)

Or of his Russian-infested syntax (derived in this case from the construction *nado teper' iskat'* ['must now search']):

[32] [Pnin] realized with a pang that he had immured somewhere [. . .] the index card with notes that he had been holding all this time. Must now search and search through 2500 thin pages, some torn!
(78)

The pervading opposition between ND and CD in the novel is concisely encapsuled in the following, a humorously abrupt shift from a purely Pninian idiom into the distinctively "Nabokovian" language assigned to N:

[33] [ND+CD] There had been (to pick out here and there only special offenders) that room in the eminently hermetic-looking Duke's Lodge, Waindellville: a delightful *kabinet* [i.e. a Russian 'study'], [ND] above which, however, every evening among crashing bathroom cascades and banging doors, two monstrous statues on primitive legs would grimly tramp – [20]
(63)

(ii) *Clichés and Stylistic Poshlost'.* "Nothing is more exhilarating than philistine vulgarity" ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L,* 305), says VN, naming one of the staple objects of satire in his fiction. On the plane of idiom this particular mental condition – elsewhere designated by the author with the polyvalent Russian noun *poshlost'* (cf. the famous entries on the term in *NG,* 63–74; and *SO,* 100–1) – best expresses itself through clichés, set phrases, and every conceivable variety of verbal banality. (See also VN's comments on cliché-cultivation in "Philistines and Philistinism"; *Lectures 2,* 310.)

As above, when such traits occur in a narrative context it would be merely naive to decode them as signs of *the author's* flagging stylistic control, or of his "bad taste".[21] It is necessary to notice, for example, in the following excerpt, that the crass banality is included strictly for the purpose of defining the quality of the reflecting mind:

[34] As it was, the whole thing had taken on an absurd, improper turn. Everything had been absurd and improper – beginning with the glove and ending with the ashtray. But now, of course, there was nothing to be done about it – *he would have to drain this cup . . .*
(AffH; *RB,* my emphasis)

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19. In a letter to VN dated March 17, 1957 and detailing the linguistic "slips" in the first printing of *Pnin,* Edmund Wilson suggests altering this into the idiomatically correct "teamed" (*Letters,* 310). He overlooks the possibility of ND–CD contamination.

20. Compare this to the description given in VN's own voice in Introduction to *Bend Sinister* of "the dingy little flat in Craigie Circle, Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I lodged under an old lady with feet of stone" (vii).

21. E.g. when CROFTS singles out the expression "my sweet trusting woggy" in *Laughter in the Dark* as "a dreadful lapse in taste" (1965, 18), one may wonder whose taste is in fact on trial, for the phrase is culled directly from Margot's banal discourse to her lover (cf. *LD,* 65).

Other examples of set phrases used for characterological effects (the emphases are added):

[35] [Eleanor] looked thoughtfully at the *nice* clean gloves on her hands, and went out.
(Aur; *ND*, 85)

[36] A *nice*, new-looking house with a *nice* green door to which a white card was affixed attracted [Franz], and he blithely rang the bell.[22]
(*KQKn*, 47)

[37] And suddenly an extraneous image floated by [. . .] like those *cute* objects that move by themselves in commercial cinema advertisements.
(*ibid*, 183)

[38] Margot had only a very vague idea of what she was really aiming at, though there was always that vision of herself as a screen beauty in *corgeous* furs being helped out of a *corgeous* car by a *corgeous* hotel porter under a giant umbrella.
(*LD*, 19)

[39] An *awfully* unfortunate man, with an unfortunate nose, in an *awful* old fedora, passed by.
(BN; *RB*, 40)

[40] She bought a bunch of *wonderful* bananas.
(*ibid*, 41)

[41] Everything had been so *wonderful* that she did not immediately become aware of her second-best bag of imitation crocodile under her.
(*KQKn*, 97)

In addition, diminutives provide a rich mother lode of verbal *poshlost'*.[23] Compare:

[42] She remained standing on the landing of the theatrically illumined blue staircase until with a *winky-wink* he was gone.
(*ibid*, 159)

[43] Franz wanted to continue at once but she said that first of all she must take off her dress and stockings, and make herself *comfy* in bed. The coat and hat were transferred to a chair. What Martha called *'your macky'*[24] was rinsed and slipped on again.
(*ibid*, 97)

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22. The automatic *nice* succinctly describes the inability of the central C-agents in *King, Queen, Knave* to make any valid distinctions in their lives. Franz sprinkles himself with "all sorts of nice lotions" (80), while Martha promenades on "a rather nice boulevard" (100) or plans to present her paramour with "some nice cuff links" (122). Later the two lovers will set upon a search for "a nice lonely spot" (179) to do away with Martha's cumbersome husband.

23. This is an even more effective device in VN's Russian work. Cf. e.g. Varvara Klimovna's rapt ecstasy at "*dve pary noven'kikh nochnykh tufel', – bol'shie klechatye i malen'kie krasnye s pomponchikami*" (RCh R; *RCh*, 9); in the English revision the slippers occur with more neutral "pompons" (RCh; *DS*, 63). The lawyer in the Russian version of *Invitation to a Beheading* refers to "*zakonchik*" (163) – "the dear little law" (*IB*, 177–8) – according to which Cincinnatus is to be beheaded, and the schedule for the execution is read out from "*spisochek*" (*IB* R, 162) – "the little list" (*IB*, 176). In the drama *Sobytie*, Revshin asks for "*chashechku kofe* [*a tiny cup of coffee]" (Act I; 50); while in *Look at the Harlequins!* it is Vadim who lampoons the Russian proclivity for banal diminutives (the translation is his own): " 'Here', said Mrs. Blagovo 'is your *chaishko s molochiskom* [teeny tea with weeny milk]' " (112).

24. Martha's ludicrous euphemism for a contraceptive device illustrates a pervasive tendency in VN's writing to conjoin linguistic play with some definitely grotesque effects. In a somewhat similar manner, the author himself simulates the verbal manner of his German acquaintance "Dietrich" in *Speak, Memory* when he depicts the latter taking photographs of executions with a "teeny-weeny camera" in the sleeve of his raincoat (279).

Stylistic Motifs and Motif Recurrence

We are accustomed to assigning stylistic elements in a narrative to the author's personal mode of expression. We do this with a particular avidity when studying the work of a renowned "stylist" like VN, whose manner of writing – we may assume – is largely shaped by the vicissitudes of his life-history.[25] At the same time, we should recognize that in many instances style itself – recurrent tropes and images, an emphasis on given motifs at the expense of others – is also determined by the fictive points of view employed by the author in his work. (The phenomenon allies with the Russian Formalists' notion of *psychological motivation:* the choice of stylistic motifs in a narrative in concordance with the hero's mentality. See EJKHENBAUM [1924b, 144–157] on imagery in Lermontov's prose and DOLEŽEL [1973a, 97–111] on related instances in Czech fiction. For summary comments cf. PASCAL 1977, 105 ff.; MCHALE 1978, 271–2; BRINTON 1980, 376.)

The cases may vary from single occurrences of "motivated" phrases to complete networks of interlinking imagery and motifs. The strategy is laid bare in the following excerpt from *Pnin,* where the shift from Victor Wind's artistically oriented point of view ([a]–[c]) into the homosexual purview of his drawing master ([d], [f]) becomes indicated through an overt narratorial reminder ([e]). Lake's taste for "lads" has been intimated already in an earlier passage (cf. 95).

> [44] [a] [Victor] dreamed of mellowing his pigments as the Old Masters had done – with honey, fig juice, poppy oil, and slime of pink snails. [b] He loved water colors and he loved oils, but was wary of the too fragile pastel and the too coarse distemper. [c] He studied his mediums with the care and patience of an insatiable child – [d] one of those painter's apprentices [e] (it is now Lake who is dreaming!), [f] lads with bobbed hair and bright eyes who would spend years grinding colors in the workshop of some great Italian skiagrapher, in a world of amber and paradisal glazes.
> (98)

Erotically-toned imagery (often more than "toned") functions everywhere in VN's fiction as a sign of the subjective perceptions of C. A telling example occurs in *King, Queen, Knave,* when Martha's return from the first tryst with her lover is depicted. The brief scene is, to apply a phrasing originally coined for somewhat less explicit instances, "all bathed in the climate of [C-agent's] mood" (LUBBOCK 1921, 70).[26]

> [45] Martha turned [. . .] and was on her street. [. . .] She passed quickly along the gravel path leading to the porch. At that instant the sun swept across the soft underbelly of the white sky, found a slit, and radiantly burst through.
> (100)

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25. E.g. BODENSTEIN (1977, 4–16 and *passim*) would seem to seek the explanation for the diversity of lexical materials in VN's prose solely from the author's cosmopolitan background. Cf. also the stylistic analyses by NAKHIMOVSKY 1977 and GRAYSON 1978, 182–212. These are far from futile surveys, but they fail to take into account the effect exerted by narrative point of view on individual verbal devices.

26. Lubbock was discussing passages from Tolstoj and Flaubert in which the protagonist's "moods" are variously reflected on the stylistic surface of the narrative. Characteristic instances occur throughout both *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary.* The parodic linkage with these works is laid entirely bare elsewhere in *King, Queen, Knave* as it is told of Martha that "she was no Emma, and no Anna" (101). VN himself refers in his Foreword to "[his] amiable little imitations of *Madame Bovary*" (*ibid,* viii). Cf. also above ex. [9].

An analogous construction from *The Gift* – the entire landscape partaking, as it were, in Fyodor's musings:

> [46] He imagined what he had constantly been imagining during the past two months – beginning (tomorrow night!) of his full life with Zina – the release, the slaking – and meanwhile a sun-charged cloud, filling up, growing, with swollen, turquoise veins, with a fiery itch in its thunder-root, rose in all its turgid, unwieldy magnificence and embraced him, the sky and the forest, and to resolve this tension seemed a monstrous joy incapable of being borne by man.
> (327)

When such instances are threaded through more extensive stretches of narration, entire patterns of recurrence assume the role of ND+CD markers.

In "A Nursery Tale" the ludicrous presentation of Berlin streets largely in terms of female anatomy – as a showcase of "silk-hosed calves" (*TD,* 42), "nice legs" (48), "elegant legs" (53), "magnificent legs, naked nearly up to the groin" (*ibid*) – is again motivated by the youthful hero's erotic fantasies. (It is appropriate, moreover, that the emphasis stays precisely on "legs", as it is indicated that timid Erwin never dared to observe the faces of his potential mistresses [cf., 42].) The strategy was duplicated by VN in the presentation of Franz's first impressions of Berlin in the opening chapters of *King, Queen, Knave* (46 *passim*).

Another major group of recurrences is produced by the notable frequency of *game imagery* in VN's fiction. While this is a feature of the author's personal style as well,[27] there occur instances in which the tropes are motivated directly from the point of view of the hero. In *The Defense,* in particular, the consistent vision of NW as a gameboard-like patchwork of "combinations", "moves", and other chess-like effects is clearly attributable to grandmaster Luzhin's own pattern-obsessed mind (an obsession hardly less powerful than the erotic passions observed above). Compare:

> [47] Once the visitors began to come, appearing every evening now in various combinations, Luzhin was unable to be alone with his fiancée for a single moment.
> (102)

> [48] It diverted him especially as the witty repetition of a particular combination, which occurs, for example, when a strictly problem idea, long since discovered in theory, is repeated in a striking guise on the board in live play.
> (105)

> [49] Just as some combination, known from chess problems, can be indistinctly repeated on the board in actual play – so now the consecutive repetition of a familiar pattern was becoming noticeable in his present life.[28]
> (168)

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27. VN described landscape in terms of a chess-simile as early as in the 1923 lyric "*Lunnaja noch'*":
> [. . .] *ten' chornaja listvy drobitsja na peske,*
> *i plat'e devushki, stojashchej pod kashtana,*
> *beleet, kak platok na shakhmatnoj doske . . .*
> [* [. . .] the black shadow of the foliage is scattered along the sand,/and the dress of the girl standing under the chestnut tree/is glowing white, as a petal on a chessboard . . .]
> (*GP,* 32)
>
> We shall be returning to the narrative uses of chess on various occasions in this study.

28. For other metaphoric functions of chess in *The Defense* see also 46, 79, 92, 99, 100, 110, 111, 112, 128, 158, 167, 185–6, 201. For an analysis of the comprehensive narrative pattern in the novel from this standpoint cf. 2.3.3.

Similarly the suggestion is inbuilt in *Bend Sinister* and *The Gift* that the occurrences of chess terminology in ND ("a lantern moved, knight-wise, to check him" [*BS,* 6]; cf. also *ibid,* 74; *G,* 187, 313, 343) are derived from the mental worlds of the heroes. (For Krug's interest in the game cf. *BS,* 80; for Fyodor cf. *G,* 164–6.)

Still another often-noted stylistic device in Nabokovian writing is constituted by its emphasis on a variety of *cinematographic* materials. The tendency has obvious connections with VN's own, largely ironic interest in cultural *kitsch* ("popular pulp", as he has defined it; cf. *SO,* 117; *NG,* 68 *passim*);[29] but it can also be made to signal points of view completely distanced from the author. The cinema motif keeps recurring in this function e.g. in *Laughter in the Dark,* where the heroine banally envisions herself as "the chief actress in a mysterious and passionate film-drama" (95; cf. also 19, 60, 76, 79). In *Bend Sinister* the whole of the "Ekwilist" society persists in viewing the world in terms of hackneyed patterns of popular culture (68–71 *passim*).[30]

In *King, Queen, Knave,* the motif is similarly manipulated to qualify the banal world-view assigned to the three protagonists. It is solely from Martha's perspective that her husband is seen "spreading out monstrously [. . .], like a conflagration in a cinema picture" (199) or that the initial murder scheme is conceived: "The door to the parlor would be open. From its threshold [Franz] would fire half a dozen times in quick succession, as they do in American films" (179). Even Martha's affair with her boorish nephew receives its motivation from Franz's alleged resemblance to "the actor Hess in *The Hindu Student,* a movie" (50).

The latter parallel is instrumental in bringing about a larger network of recurrences, tying together several compositional strands in *King, Queen, Knave.* "Hess" is mentioned again in Martha's discourse on a film entitled "*The Prince*" ("[. . .] the student at Heidelberg disguised as a Hindu prince" [61–2]). She later tries to make believe that her paramour is "a Heidelberg student" (111), laments that Franz is not "studying medicine" (165), and finds him "look[ing] more than ever like a hungry Hindu" (200) near the close of the narrative. In addition, Franz's landlord is paralleled with "the professor in the 'Hindu Prince' farce" (87), and Martha herself is seen taking up "Hindu-kitsch exercises" (158, 205, 256) as a pretext for stealing away to the trysts with her lover. The series of recurrences is summarized with an apt irony – no longer within the purview of the protagonists – as an item in a newspaper informs us that not too long after Martha and Franz began their affair "a car had overturned killing its occupant, the famous actor Hess, on his way to his sick wife's bedside" (115). In the concluding chapter we find Dreyer speeding in his car to Martha's bedside (264), but our anticipations are playfully upended in the text: the car is not overturned, Dreyer is not killed, but (contrary to every cinematographic formula) the heroine herself succumbs to a common cold.[31]

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29. See APPEL (1974) for a book-length account of cinematographic allusions in VN's work. While Appel to my mind somewhat over-emphasizes the "influence" of particular movies seen – or sometimes not seen (*ibid,* 310–11) – by the author on given scenes in his novels, the subject is in itself a rewarding one. Cf. esp. 61–151 for an expert survey of the substructure of *kitsch* entombed in *Lolita.*

30. For a comprehensive discussion of movie-parallels in *Bend Sinister* cf. BIENSTOCK 1982. For related comments on *Laughter in the Dark* cf. STUART 1970; 1978, 87–113. "Cinematographic imagery" is tabulated also in BODENSTEIN 1977, 431–41.

31. Compare in addition the references to the emblematic movie-theater, under construction for the larger part of the novel (48, 99, 132, 198). As *King, Queen, Knave* ends, also the

Value Judgments and Attitudinal Terms

Evaluations and attitudes in a narrative may be presented directly in ND:

> [50] One night, [Albinus] [. . .] was giving his learned mind a holiday and writing a little essay (nothing brilliant, he was not a particularly gifted man) [. . .]
> (*LD*, 5)

They may be couched as direct discourse by C:

> [51] [Margot to Albinus:] You're a liar, a coward and a fool.
> (*ibid*, 35)

Or they may be distributed among separate agents in the text, in which case the reader is required to infer from the context of the utterance whether given judgments belong to N or any of his C-agents. The latter instances are mainly those that BAKHTIN indicated with his notion of "the hero [. . .] as a *particular point of view*" (1963, 38; Bakhtin's emphasis). Other investigators have studied the problem under the more specific headings of "attitudinal" or "ideological" viewpoint (USPENSKY 1970, 8–16 *passim;* cf. also DOLEŽEL 1973a, 35–7; MCHALE 1978, 272–3, 280–1; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 81–2).

A simple example of such play with attitudes – a veritable text-book case – is seen in the following passage from *The Defense* as the narration alternates between two diametrically opposite views of the hero, neither of which can be unequivocally assigned to the auctorial N. The contrast between the rivalling stances (the first one deriving from the hero's fiancée [a], the second from the mother-in-law [c]) is an overt one:

> [52] [a] The five of them carried Luzhin up the stairs and his fiancée, supporting the heavy, precious head, let out a cry when the light over the staircase suddenly went out. [b] In the darkness everything swung, [. . .] and when the light came on again one of the strangers was sitting on a stair and the other was being crushed by Luzhin's body, while higher up, on the landing, stood Mother in a gaudily embroidered robe, surveying with bright prominent eyes [c] the lifeless body that her husband, groaning and muttering, was supporting, and the large awful head that lay on her daughter's shoulder.
> (116–17)

Also in the next excerpt from *Pnin* it is clear that the accumulation of attitudinal terms originates in the mental world of Miss "Bliss" herself, whose pat values are being quietly simulated under the guise of indirect narration. The literary parallels serve as an additional marker of point of view, as it is suggested that they are lifted directly from Pnin's seminar on Russian classics:

> [53] This Betty Bliss, a plump maternal girl of some twenty-nine summers, was a soft thorn in Pnin's aging flesh. Ten years before she had had *a handsome heel* for a lover, who had jilted her for *a little tramp*, and later she had had a dragging, hopelessly complicated, Chekhovian rather than Dostoevskian affair with a cripple who was now married to his nurse, *a cheap cutie*.
> (42; my emphases)

Somewhat closer attention to such reshufflings of the evaluative viewpoint is required when the game is extended from local contexts to encompass, as it were, the compre-

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construction is finished, and the first film to be shown in the theater is entitled "*King, Queen, Knave*" (48, 99, 132, 172, 198, 216, 224, 261).

hensive world-view of the narrative. Nabokovian fiction sometimes displays a tendency towards confusing oscillations between assessments presented in straightforward ND and judgments blatantly contradicting the very values that have just been associated with the auctorial position. In these cases our ability to keep track of the alternating points of view will have direct bearing on our understanding of the overall ideology of the text. (Cf. also BRONZWAER on cases in which the presented points of view are in "functional contrast" [1970, 54] and VOLOSHINOV/BAKHTIN 1930, 170.)

In *Bend Sinister,* it is the totalitarian ideology of "Ekwilism" that on occasion contaminates the auctorial discourse, while at the same time a heavily satiric stance is taken towards totalitarianism elsewhere in the novel. If the reader fails to discern the adaptations of ND to the party jargon – or to the "idiom of the group", to apply a rather fitting term in MCHALE 1978, 270 – he will also miss the full impact of the Nabokovian ironies:

> [54] The posters [propagating the Ekwilist revolution] gave a *delightful touch of civic maturity* to the humble hamlet squatting under its low mossy roofs. Several scrawny peasant women and their drum-bellied children had collected in front of the village hall, which was being *prettily decorated for the coming festivities;* and from the windows of the police station on the right uniformed clerks *followed the progress of the good work with eager eyes full of pleasant anticipation.*
> (84; my emphases)
>
> [55] Pietro shook his head: 'I do not follow you, Professor. We have exterminated the enemy – aye, we have crushed him under our heels. But one or two hydra heads are still alive, and we cannot take any chances. In a week or so, Professor, I can assure you the city will go back to normal conditions. Isn't that a promise lads?' Pietro added, turning to the other soldiers who assented eagerly, *their honest intelligent faces* lit up by *that civic ardor which transfigures even the plainest man.*[32]
> (12; emphasis as above)

Similarly Krug's anguish during his confinement at the party headquarters can seem "boorish" only to his Ekwilist jailers. What the ND+CD strategy lays bare here is precisely the inhumanity of the party *apparachiki,* insisting on decorum even at the moment of the hero's deepest human grief (his son has just been kidnapped and murdered by the government):[33]

> [56] [Kol] had apparently pressed a button or turned a knob for some trumpety-strumpety sounds issued from somewhere, and the good fellow added in a reverent whisper:
>
> 'Music in your honor'.
>
> The band was drowned, however, by a shrill telephone peal. Capital news, evidently, for Kol replaced the receiver with a triumphant flourish and motioned Krug towards the curtained door. After you.
>
> He was a man of the world; Krug was not, and pressed forward like a boorish boar.
> (192)

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32. Elsewhere there occur less enthusiastic references in ND to the Ekwilists' "civic fervor" (85) and, in Krug's voice, to "civic nonsense" (63).

33. Compare also the synchronized accounts of the kidnapping and the romance between "Cin" and "Mac", the two government agents (177–86). In a letter written a few years before the publication of *Bend Sinister* the author himself explained that for him the essence of totalitarian ideologies is not contained in economic theories or other "vulgar generalisation[s]", but in the system of style and taste embraced by their propagators (*Letters* [December 15, 1940], 31). Given passages in the novel can be understood as direct concretizations of this notion.

In a rather similar passage from *Invitation to a Beheading,* the unsuspecting reader is himself coaxed into accepting the attitude of the totalitarian functionaries towards imprisoned Cincinnatus. This happens when N dwells at somewhat deceptive length on his portrait of the protagonist, "the full indecency of which" – he says – "it is difficult to put into words" (121; cf. 120–22 for the comprehensive section).[34] Only at the conclusion of the excerpt are we overtly informed of having shared the perspective of the hero's "predatory" jailers, peering at their victim through a peephole in the prison wall. As it is suggested, the position is not entirely unlike that of any reader, observing a protagonist entrapped inside a fictive world:

> [57] . . . and all this so teased the observer as to make him long to tear apart, cut to shreds, destroy utterly this brazen elusive flesh, and all that it implied and expressed, all that impossible, dazzling freedom – enough, enough – do not walk any more Cincinnatus, lie down on your cot, so you will not arouse, will not irritate . . . And in truth Cincinnatus would become aware of the predatory eye in the peephole following him and lie down or sit at the table and open a book.
> (122)

2.1.2.4. "View of Reality": The Illusion Device

From the examples already recorded, there is but a minimal step to some of the most distinctively Nabokovian ploys connected with narrative point of view. It is a frequent practice in the author's fiction to present not only isolated aspects of the narrated history from given positions, but *ultimately to subsume NW in its entirety into the subjective consciousness of C.* When the discourse is at the same time made to retain all standard markers of ND, a teasing ambivalence is created with regard to the overall status of "reality" in the system of the text. As the narration weaves in and out of C-agent's mind, the reader is kept querying whether *any* straightforward report may not be revealed as a product of a purely private vision. And as the reader is deceived into accepting the most idiosyncratic assessments as actual narrative facts, he is also invited by the author to ponder the insidiousness of all real-seeming constructs.[35]

As the author has himself argued more than once: "Reality is a very subjective affair" (*SO,* 10; cf. also 111–12, 118 *passim*). He has also drawn attention to the necessity of preserving quotation marks around the notion (" 'reality' [. . .] [is] one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes" ["On a Book Entitled Lolita"; *L,* 302]).[36] And he has put forward his famous definition of "reality" as "an infinite succession of

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34. I was alerted to the point-of-view problem in this passage by comments in ALTER 1970, 56–8.

35. Related devices have sometimes been discussed by narrative theorists under such names as "substitutionary perception" or "vision by proxy" (MCHALE 1978, 278; COHN 1978, 110; BRINTON 1980, 378). DOLEŽEL (1973a, 37–9, 52–3) has some useful comments on the role of "subjective modality" in ND+CD, but to my knowledge the specifically Nabokovian uses of such modalities have never been discussed. One parallel is drawn by ADAMS (1977, 160) between a given occurrence of the device in *The Gift* (below n. 42) and a related instance from the "Nighttown"-section from Joyce's *Ulysses.* We remember that in his own discussions VN tended to *deny* all such connections (above ex. [9]).

36. "We have shown our need for quotation marks ('reality', 'dream')" (93), says the speaker in *Transparent Things,* as if picking up the earlier line of inquiry. Also Van Veen refers to "the confusion of two realities, one in single, the other in double, quotes" (*A,* 232; cf. also 219–20).

steps, levels of perception, false bottoms" that hence eludes any attempt at an objective description (*SO,* 11).

The very consistency with which these concerns are reiterated in the canon should lead us to look more closely into the forms that the notion of "false bottoms" – of reality's subjective nature on the whole – may take on the level of narrative modes.[37] I shall treat the question here under the heading of the Nabokovian *illusion device,* as it is precisely the polarity between a commonly conceived reality and a variety of illusionary constructs that VN systematically manipulates in his fiction. (The author's cue for pronouncing the name of his Russian hero in *The Defense* is not an idle one: "['Luzhin'] rhymes with 'illusion' " [Foreword, 7]. Cf. also his comments on "all those limp, lisping l's of lean illusion" in *Lectures 3,* 70.)

The device may be illustrated in more detail by one of its earliest occurrences in the canon. "An Affair of Honor" (*RB,* 83–115) is a thirty-page novella narrated almost entirely from the point of view of its hero, the émigré businessman Anton Petrovich, whose unhappy brush with the Russian duelling-code constitutes the central action in the narrative.[38] That we have mainly to do with the hero's subjective vision is signalled immediately in the opening clauses, with their mixture of indirect narration (ND), C-agent's own evaluative language (ND+CD), and direct quotations of his efforts to recall the origins of the fatal affair (CD):

> [58] [ND+CD] The accursed day when Anton Petrovich made the acquaintance of Berg existed only in theory, for his memory had not affixed to it a date label at the time, and now it was impossible to identify that day. Broadly speaking, it happened last winter around Christmas, 1926. [. . .] [CD] It was at the Kurdyumovs', who lived on St. Mark Strasse, I believe. [ND] The Kurdyumovs remained the paupers they had become after the Revolution, while Anton Petrovich and Berg, although also expatriates, had since grown somewhat richer.
> (83)

From here on, the narration keeps observing the movements of Anton Petrovich's mind, variously shifting between the three basic modes and preparing the reader, as it were, for the ultimate takeover of C-agent's illusion on the concluding pages.[39] Compare the presentation of Anton Petrovich's reflections after he has discovered Berg in his wife's bedroom:

> [59] [ND] Scarcely aware of what he was doing, Anton Petrovich followed him out. As they started to go down the stairs, Berg, who was in front, suddenly began to laugh. [. . .] At the next landing he chuckled again and accelerated his step. Anton Petrovich also quickened his pace. [ND+CD] That dreadful rush was unseemly . . . Berg was deliberately making him go down in leaps and bounds. [CD] What torture . . . Third floor . . . Second . . . When will these stairs end?
> (86)

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37. Cf. also the assertion by LOTMAN that the main task of narrative point of view is to "re-create that most important aspect of reality – the impossibility of any one definitive and exhaustive interpretation" (1970b, 351).

38. The story has been previously discussed from a stylistic standpoint by NAUMANN (1978, 126–37), but the question of narrative point of view is not treated in an adequate manner here. For remarks on this otherwise neglected story cf. also FIELD 1967, 237–8 plus the review of *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* by CETLIN 1930, 531.

39. NAUMANN refers to "the shifting narrator" (1978, 130), but this is misleading. Only the narrative *modes* keep shifting.

After his wife's departure:

> [60] [ND] Natasha's lips quivered; she quickly kissed him on the cheek and went out. [ND+CD] How strange that she did not start imploring him not to fight. By all rights she ought to have implored him not to fight. [CD] In our time nobody fights duels. She is wearing the same perfume as . . . As who? [ND+CD] No, no, he had never been married.
> (95–6)

After his challenge has been accepted by Berg, a few hours away from the proposed duel:

> [61] [ND] Anton Petrovich was cold and had an unbearable headache. [CD] A nip of brandy would be paradise. None in the house. House already deserted; master going away forever. Oh, nonsense. We insist on calmness. The front door bell will ring in a moment. I must keep perfectly calm. The bell is going to ring right now. They are already three minutes late. Maybe they won't come? Such a marvellous summer morning . . . Who was the last person killed in a duel in Russia? A Baron Manteuffel, twenty years ago. No, they won't come. Good. [ND+CD] He would wait another half-hour, and then go to bed.
> (104)

Here, then, is the decisive shift, rendering Anton Petrovich's assessment of his situation after the scandalous escape from the duel-site. Hiding in a shabby hotelroom he gradually loses himself in a private reverie:

> [62] [ND+CD] Perhaps there was a way out? They had tormented him for a while, but enough was enough. Yes, he had to decide. [ND] He remembered the suspicious gaze of the man at the desk. [CD] What should one say to that person? Oh, obviously: 'I'm going to fetch my luggage – I left it at the station'. [ND?/ND+CD?/CD?] So. Goodbye for ever, little hotel! The street, thank God, was now clear: Leontiev had finally given up and left. How do I get to the nearest streetcar stop? Oh, just go straight, my dear sir, and you will reach the nearest streetcar stop. No, better take a taxi. Off we go. The streets grow familiar again. Calmly, quite calmly. Tip the taxi driver. Home! Five floors. Calmly, quite calmly he went into the front hall. Then quickly opened the parlor door. My, what a surprise!
>
> In the parlor, around the circular table, sat Mityushin, Gnushke and Tanya. On the table stood bottles, glasses, and cups. Mityushin beamed – pink-faced, shiny-eyed, drunk as an owl. Gnushke was drunk too, and also beamed, rubbing his hands together. Tanya was sitting with her bare elbows on the table, gazing at him motionlessly . . .
> (114)

It would be difficult to determine the precise "mode" in the final segment, for no formal markers define it as the hero's illusion. Clearly we are not dealing with an objective narratorial report, but neither does it seem plausible to read the sentences as "uttered" by C (their tense and personal system still by and large simulate ND). It is only after the ensuing, two-page account of Anton Petrovich's return to his wife, scenes of reconciliation and retribution, even excerpts of imaginary dialogue incorporated into the narration (114–15), that the entire series of episodes turns out to be a pure fabrication, cruelly incompatible with the actuality of his situation. The conclusion features a shift back to ND and "reality":

> [63] Anton Petrovich smiled broadly, got up, and started fidding with the ribbon of his monocle. His smile slowly faded away. Such things don't happen in real life.
> (115)

This contrast between C-agent's perceived reality and his imaginary dream-life[40] is illustrative in calling forth also another strategy, very characteristic of Nabokovian writing on the whole. VN has always been wont to play with the relationship existing between separate "levels" of narrated reality in his fiction. Such *interpenetration of levels* is normally signalled through a series of more or less covert markers: correlations between motifs belonging to diverse planes of the narrated reality, or occurrences of *the same* plot-detail on separate narrative levels – each of these instances tending to puncture the hero's private fiction and contaminate it with markers of "real life" situated behind it.[41]

In "An Affair of Honor" the effect is produced through a simple reiteration of the motif of "a ham sandwich" both within and without Anton Petrovich's reverie. "A big ham sandwich, with the edge of fat overlapping" (115) is brought to the hero after his imaginary homecoming, while the occurrence of the same motif in the concluding paragraph ("[. . .] the hanging margin of fat [. . .]") carries with it the suggestion that not only a sense of dishonor but also plain hunger may have prompted the fantasy. An identical instance is seen in the first chapter of *The Gift,* when Fyodor's pinching shoes comically intrude into the lofty dialogue on Russian literature that he keeps imagining between himself and the poet Koncheyev.[42] The device is given still greater prominence in "Details of a Sunset", where the second half of the story is in its entirety rendered as a delirium in the mind of the dying protagonist (cf. *DS,* 23–6), and only the recurrences of the "green"-motif, alternately denoting the green dress of the hero's fiancée (18, 24, 25) and the green lampshade swaying above his death-bed (25), indicate the oscillations between dream and reality.[43]

The two conjoined strategies – deceptive presentation of C-agent's mental constructs and simultaneous "puncturing" of the illusion with covert markers implanted in the narration – prove to be productive throughout the canon, and several variations of the device can still be named. In *King, Queen, Knave* Martha's meeting with the "stranger"

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40. Notice that Anton Petrovich's mind makes efforts to dismiss the whole history as a mere "dream" even before the final plunge: "No, this is unthinkable, I must wake up" (108; cf. also 87).

41. In his Foreword to the drama *The Waltz Invention* VN discusses "intermissions of oblivion between the acts of [the hero's] fancy, [. . .] a sudden thinning of the texture, a rubbed spot in the bright fabric, allowing the nether life to glimmer through" (ii). This aptly describes the technique that we confront also in his prose fiction.

42. Compare:

> [Fyodor:] '[. . .] Lyov Tolstoy, on the other hand, preferred violet shades and the bliss of stepping barefoot with the rooks upon the rich dark soil of ploughed fields! Of course, I should never have bought them.'
> [Koncheyev:] 'You're right, they pinch unbearably. But we have moved up to the first rank. [. . .]
> (74)

The shoe-motif recurs also on 66–7 and 77. For previous comments on this example cf. ADAMS 1977, 160 (above n. 35).

43. In this instance, too, the reality-plane of NW is overtly paralleled with a "dream": "Mark no longer breathed, Mark had departed – whither, into what other dreams, none can tell" (26). In "*Terra Incognita*" the same ambivalence is sustained throughout the whole length of the narrative, as it is never fully resolved which of the given motifs represent the protagonist's "reality" and which belong to his private "delirium". He himself comes to realize by the conclusion of the story that "everything beyond death is [. . .] fictitious" (*RB,* 127).

wandering about the Dreyer premises (cf. 100–1) becomes motivated from her private perspective, as it is indicated that after the tryst with Franz she finds it increasingly difficult to recognize her own husband (the "completely superfluous Mr. Dreyer" [101]).[44] In the concluding chapter of *The Gift* the rendezvous between Fyodor and his deceased father turns out to be another of the hero's fantasies, misleadingly couched in objective narratorial language (333–6). Krug's surrealistic meeting with Quist in *Bend Sinister* discloses an analogous pattern (168–70). And also the two flight-episodes in *Invitation to a Beheading* (18–20, 163–6) prove to have their origins solely in Cincinnatus's dreams of an "escape" (expanded in the end into an effort to construe the entire prison-setting as nothing but a "masquerade [. . .] staged in his own brain" [213]).

In *Pnin* it is the hero's subjective memory that takes over, as Pnin's walk through the Waindell Campus in 1953 becomes quietly transformed into a stroll amidst the Russian landscapes of his youth ("[. . .] a Russian wildwood enveloped the rambler [. . .]" [cf. 82]). Similar instances occur again in *The Gift,* where Fyodor is seen stepping straight from a Berlin street into the forest surrounding the Godunov-Cherdyntsevs' family manor at Leshino (80–2; again on 86). Even in *Mary* – VN's first full-length novel – the narrative was based on an all but total subordination of the hero's immediate reality (i.e. his "dream-life in exile" [52]) to his sustained recollections of a vanished Russian boyhood (aptly termed by himself his "real life" [*ibid;* cf. also 55, 62, 95, 113]).[45]

In this way, a prevasive tendency underlying the manipulation of "the other's" discourse in the Nabokovian narrative becomes apparent. In VN's narratives C-agents are not presented as mere objects of N-agent's (auctorial) discourse. Within the bounds of their fictive universe *the heroes also strive to construct new fictions,* hence duplicating the processes underlying the creation of the narrative text as a whole. The extent to which the protagonists are still made to *fail* in their efforts – like Anton Petrovich fails to replace reality with pure invention – is ultimately a measure of the success belonging to the author, covertly controlling the totality of the discourses behind the backs of his invented speakers. This suggestion will come up again at various points in the subsequent analyses.

2.1.3. ND–CD Shifts as a Structural Principle: The System of Narrative Modes in *The Gift*

The problems involved in reading *The Gift* can be profitably approached, I propose, with the notions of ND and CD as they were delineated in our survey. At the same time, the notions themselves may be specified further through an examination of the novel, for as we shall soon notice it is the precise relationship between the two modes that is elevated into a major problem in the narrative system of the text.

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44. This is still one of the Tolstoj parodies incorporated into the novel (cf. above n. 26). Also Anna muses on the "strangeness" of Karenin when she returns home from her initial meeting with Vronskij (TOLSTOJ 1875–7, 119).

45. Compare in this respect the conclusion of the "entomological" Chapter Six in *Speak, Memory,* where VN brings together within a single paragraph a collecting-trip undertaken while the memoir was already in progress in the 1940's and another one, taking place on the banks of the Oredezh River more than thirty years earlier (137–9). Similar interminglings of personal reminiscences and "reality" are typical of the mode of perception allotted to a whole host of the author's past-obsessed protagonists.

The importance given to point of view in the novel should become apparent from the barest exposition of its plot-line. The narrative concentrates on roughly three years[46] in the life of its principal hero, the budding émigré author Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev – on his daily existence in Berlin; on his romance with the daughter of his landlady, Zina; and on his preparations for a future career as a Russian novelist. During this period of literary apprenticeship Fyodor is repeatedly shown in the act of construing in his mind those very "discourses" that constitute the actual novel (i.e. "tr[ying] [. . .] to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person" [41]; cf. above exs. [2]–[3] for two of the key passages in the novel). As a result, his creative exercises are seen to produce a whole series of autonomous constructions, variously conjoined with the primary narrative: the imaginary review of his early verse in the opening chapter (cf. 16–34); the mental colloquys that he conducts with the poet Koncheyev (73–8, 320–5); the patches of interior monologue attributed by Fyodor to Alexander Chernyshevski (38–9, 40, 56, 293–6); the comprehensive history of the younger Chernyshevski's suicide in Chapter One (42–53); the biography of Fyodor's father fragmentarily threaded throughout Chapter Two (79, 99–122, 124, 125, 127, 131–5).[47]

Moreover, the text contains instances in which Fyodor proceeds to assess his own creative skills from the position of other C-agents in the novel: the hypothetical reviewer (19–20, 22 *passim*); Koncheyev (esp. 320–2); Mme Godunov-Cherdyntsev (cf. the references to "maternal pride" or "a maternal tear" on 35); or even the entire émigré reading public at large (66). As we are told, at such moments of self-observation Fyodor "would almost physically feel a change in the color of his eyes, and also *in the color behind his eyes*" (*ibid;* my emphasis): an apt enough definition of "point of view" in the wider sense of the term that we have been applying here.

It will emerge, in fact, that the most fundamental "plot" in *The Gift* – "the *real* plot" as VN has written elsewhere (*NG,* 144; emphasis in the text) – concerns primarily the hero's efforts to adopt the position of an extrinsic appraiser *with regard to his own perceiving self.* The novel depicts its hero actively striving to manipulate "the color behind his eyes", not only for the purpose of experiencing reality from diverse viewpoints, but ultimately to apprehend his own efforts from the point of view of a creative "author". The resultant structure is in many ways a culmination of the Nabokovian experiments with point of view in fiction: a novelistic design derived directly from the consciousness of its main hero, but also one in which the transmitted perceptions are still made to retain their subordinate status in the total hierarchy of the novel.

In the discussion that follows I shall not be so much attempting to "interpret" this structure as to systematize the narrative strategies required for its making. I shall first take up the main approaches to *The Gift* proposed in earlier scholarship. Secondly, I shall suggest certain modifications by isolating the narrative modes that are specific to the novel. The last section will comment on the thematic sense behind the overall

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46. In prefacing "The Circle" – "a small satellite" (*RB,* 254) of the novel – VN has verified that the action in *The Gift* begins on April 1, 1926 and ends on June 29, 1929 (*ibid*). The text of the novel itself remains noticeably reticent about exact dates (cf. the opening paragraph on 11).

47. In addition, Chapter Four (203–85) is taken up in its entirety by "*The Life of Chernyshevski*", Fyodor's book on the nineteenth-century Russian thinker. Unlike any of the segments named above, the latter biography purports to be actually *written* by the hero and does not enter our inquiry at this point.

system. I would argue that besides its literary interest in its own right – which is considerable – *The Gift* is interesting also as an innovative reapplication of the standard functions belonging to N and C, illustrating in the end a peculiar fusion of the two principally divergent agents.

Approaches

Despite the seminal place it occupies in the author's canon,[48] *The Gift* has turned out to be one of VN's least reviewed and studied novels. In part, this neglect must be due to the irregular publishing history of the original Russian text, itself an outcome of the indignation that the novel is said to have aroused in its first readers (according to KARLINSKY "[*The Gift*] still makes elderly anti-Bolshevik Russian socialists, living in retirement in New York, spit at the mention of Nabokov's name" [1971, 16].)[49] But surely the dismissal of *The Gift* in much of subsequent Nabokov-scholarship as well is a consequence of its teasingly, we might say frustratingly, complex narrative organization.

Initially, these difficulties can be illustrated with the following catalogue of narrative forms from the novel:

first person + past tense referring to the hero's past

[64] None of the poems in the book alludes to a certain extraordinary thing that happened to me as I was recovering from a particularly severe case of pneumonia.
(28)

[65] Yasha and I had entered Berlin University at almost exactly the same time, but I did not know him although we must have passed each other many times.
(46)

[66] I met her in June 1916. She was twenty-three. [. . .] Because of her I almost forgot butterflies and completely overlooked the revolution.
(145)

first person + past tense referring to the hero's present[50]

[67] I was obscurely thrilled by Romanov's strange, beautiful, yet venomous art; I

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48. *The Gift* holds a central position in the Nabokovian output in more ways than one. Written at the mid-point of the author's career, it remains his last full-length novel to have been published in Russian, and it was among the first to be rendered into English at the outset of the post-*Lolita* period (VN indicates in his Foreword that the rough copy of the translation was completed as early as 1960–1 [*G*, 8]). One of VN's most voluminous projects, second in text-length only to *Ada* and Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, the work was specially regarded by the author. Surveying his émigré period in *Speak, Memory* he singles out *The Gift* as "the best of [. . .] [his] Russian novels" (280). Cf. also *SO*, 13.

49. We recall that Chapter Four, containing the iconoclastic Chernyshevski-biography, was suppressed *in toto* by the editors of *Sovremennye zapiski*. The complete Russian text came out only in 1952, in New York, and at the time it elicited no comments in émigré publications. For the background reasons – ideological, cultural, or purely personal – behind the tepid reception of the novel among the émigré intelligentsia see the discussions by KARLINSKY 1963, 284 and 1971, 14, 16; FIELD 1967, 19 and 1977, 221–2.

50. With *the present* we simply mean the period of time encompassing those three years during which the action unfolds (cf. above n. 46). In this sense we might say that the narrative present is constantly *on the move* in the novel. What in earlier sections represents "the present" (i.e. Fyodor's life at the Stoboy lodgings in the two first chapters) is later referred to as "the past" (as on 141: "I lived here exactly two years", and again on 174, 343). It will be noticed that there is no one-to-one correlation between the tense forms used in the novel and the actual status of the narrated time.

preceived in it both a forestalling and a forewarning [. . .]
(62)

[68] When in the mornings I entered this world of the forest [. . .] I felt as much delight as if this was a primeval paradise within two miles from Agamemnonstrasse.
(315)

[69] Why this strange embarrassment – instead of the exultant, voluble freedom I had been so eagerly looking forward to? It was as if I had grown disused from her, or else was unable to adjust myself and her, the former her, to this freedom.
(340)

first person + present tense referring to the hero's present

[70] Yes, all my life I shall be getting that extra little payment in kind to compensate my regular overpayment for merchandise foisted on me.
(13)

[71] I am simply a poor young Russian selling the surplus from a gentleman's upbringing, while scribbling verses in my spare time, that's the total of my little immortality.
(158)

[72] When I walk with you like this, ever so slowly, and hold you by the shoulder, everything slightly sways, my head hums, and I feel like dragging my feet; my left slipper falls off my heel, we crawl, dawdle, dwindle in the mist – now we are almost melted . . .
(346)

third person + past tense referring to the hero's past

[73] [. . .] Mme Chernyshevski's grief did not immediately take on that industrious, and even enraptured, form that Fyodor found when he came on the scene.
(53)

[74] Thus had Fyodor, in spite of all logic and not daring to envision its realization, lived with the familiar dream of his father's return.
(89)

[75] Just before his departure in June 1916 Godunov-Cherdyntsev came from town to Leshino to bid his family farewell. Until the very last minute Fyodor dreamed that his father would take him with him [. . .]
(129)

third person + past tense referring to the hero's present

[76] Did I take the keys? Fyodor suddenly thought, stopping and thrusting his hand into his raincoat pocket.
(35)

[77] At first Fyodor Konstantinovich felt an acute almost physical pleasure from this article [. . .]
(162)

[78] [. . .] his feet were guided by local consciousness, while the principal Fyodor Konstantinovich, and in fact the only Fyodor Konstantinovich that mattered, was already peering into the next shadowy strophe [. . .][51]
(58)

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51. There are also instances in which the two types of personal reference may occur together. Compare:

    As a book is translated into an exotic idiom, so was I translated into sun. The scrawny, chilly, hiemal Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev was now as remote from me as if I had exiled him to the Yakutsk province. He was a pallid copy of me, whereas this aestival one was his magnified bronze replica.
    (316)

Among critics who have been willing to commit themselves about the question,[52] three main lines of reading can be detected.

(i) *Fyodor=N*$_{I}$. Probably the most often reiterated approach to the novel regards it as a straightforward memoiristic account actually "narrated" by the hero. It is assumed, in other words, that Fyodor is relating the history of his early apprenticeship from the temporally distanced position of a mature literary artist: a position that he – like any teller in a traditional *Künstlerroman* – can have attained only *after* the events recorded in the history. Expressed in our previous shothand: *The Gift* is here read as a version of N$_{I}$-text replete with both explicit mentions of SA ("[. . .] we know of course that this has been worn threadbare by the efforts of a thousand male writers [. . .]" [157]) as well as overt markers of AI (I shall presently return to the "intentions" underlying Fyodor's discourse).

The difficulty with this reading is, of course, that it accommodates only portions of the comprehensive novel. While the hero's experiences are often enough couched in first-person memoiristic formulae (above exs. [64]–[66] and [67]–[69]),[53] in many cases they are not and cannot be directly assigned to an autobiographic voice. What is one to make e.g. of examples such as [70]–[72], which in effect *abolish* any differentiation between the hero's "experiencing" and "narrating" selves? What are we to say of exs. [73]–[75] or [76]–[78], in which it would appear that a clear-cut *differentiation* is made between the hero's identity and the identity of the teller who actually utters the discourse?

Somewhat half-hearted attempts have been made by critics to account for this fluctuation of personal and tense forms in the novel. It has sometimes been suggested that while it is Fyodor who does the narrating he is at the same time using third-person reference to himself as a deliberate stylistic mask (BODENSTEIN 1977, 249), which is at least a possible interpretation in view of the occurrences of the same device elsewhere in Nabokovian novels (e.g. in *The Eye, Lolita,* or *Ada*). But in no instance have reasons been forwarded for this shifting in terms of the narrative problematics of *The Gift* itself. The approach is typified by MALCOLM (1964), who in his early review first defined Fyodor as "the poet-narrator" (204) and then went on to admonish the novel for its implausible – "more than irritating" (*ibid*) – narrative technique. Other investigators

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52. It is possible, to a point, to discuss *The Gift* without reference to its specifically narratological problems. Cf. the excellent analyses of the allusive and parodistic substructure in the novel provided by KARLINSKY 1963 and 1971, 12, 14, 16. As KARLINSKY says in a later paper, "[*The Gift*] is both a novel and a compressed literary history of nineteenth-century Russia" (1983, 95). Allusions to the Russian literary and cultural tradition are also dissected by HYDE 1977, 17–37; JOHNSON 1982c, esp. 203–5; RAMPTON 1984, 64–100. This is another aspect of *The Gift* causing difficulties for the unschooled – that is non-Russian – reader, but it will not be necessary to dwell on the matter here. See however below, notes 67–8, 70–1.

53. Compare also:

> My probing thought often turns toward the original source, toward the reverse nothingness. Thus the nebulous state of the infant always seems to me to be a slow convalescence after a dreadful illness, and the receding from primal nonexistence becomes an approach to it when I strain my memory to the very limit so as to taste of that darkness and use its lessons to prepare myself for the darkness to come.
> (18)

This is an all but precise duplicate of the opening paragraph in VN's own memoir (*SM*, 19).

have been hardly more specific about the matter. (For another early account cf. CROFTS 1965, 17. The same hypothesis has been put forward also by COUTURIER 1979, 39; FREIWALD 1980/81, 114; LONG 1984, 54. SALEHAR [1974, 70] suggests that the novel may represent a "journal" kept by the hero during his apprenticeship.)

(ii) N_E+SR_O. A different stand is taken towards the novel by those critics who posit in *The Gift* an extrinsic (auctorial) N, fully divorced from the person of the hero and on occasion tending towards overt commentary on his narrative-producing function. E.g. in a discussion of the hero's embedded "texts" and the text of *The Gift* itself DAVYDOV differentiates between the hero and "the author" (1982, 188–96), although it remains somewhat unclear in what sense the latter term should be taken. Likewise, DEMBO states that "*The Gift* concludes with a declaration by its author, just as *Bend Sinister* does" (1967b, 16).

While the second view has never been made altogether explicit, it would seem that here at least a portion of the "first-person" references in the novel (i.e. the conclusion: "Good-bye my book" [346]) are assigned to "the author", with no regard for the hero's own control over the narrative.[54] On the other hand, one can easily see that quite a few excerpts belonging to this type still derive from Fyodor (exs. [64] through [72]). No precise criteria have been suggested by critics for differentiating between the diverse types of self-reference occurring in the text.

(iii) N_E+*"zero" SR*. The third view, finally, leads to an exclusion of any kind of narratorial presence from the novel, granting full responsibility for the discourse to the hero. More specifically, it is suggested that all segments of discourse in the text are to be understood as representing Fyodor's "stream of consciousness" – or as dictated by his consciousness – and that the role of the auctorial N is hence reduced to that of a mere recorder of the hero's mental monologue.

The stream-of-consciousness reading was first put forward in a paper by BEGNAL (1980, cf. 138–9) and developed with great acumen by LEVIN (1981), whose analysis clearly supersedes all previous accounts of the novel. As Levin asserts, even though *The Gift* is characterized by various markers normally found only in auctorial narration, it nevertheless contains *"no explicit author, nor [. . .] any other figure who would be writing the text of the novel" (196). He then proceeds to defend in detail his thesis that *"the point of view in the novel [. . .] coincides *in every instance* with the point of view of [Fyodor]" (205; Levin's emphasis; cf. also 197), classifying the types of discourse occurring in the novel and explaining the motivations that can be found for them from Fyodor's own aesthetic goals (esp. 191–210).[55] If this version of the N_E-hypothesis is accepted, *The Gift* comes to exemplify a "zero-degree" of N-agent's self-reference, for ultimately every instance in the discourse is retracable back to the hero's reflecting consciousness.

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54. LEE has stated that parts of the narrative are "told to us [. . .] by Nabokov – who is [. . .] Fyodor" (1976, 83), which, if anything, only complicates the issue.

55. To employ the alibi customarily used in such cases: it was only after having completed the first draft of the present chapter that I came across Levin's superb analysis. There will be some inevitable overlappings between his findings and those of my own, but since many of our conclusions still seem to differ, I venture to pursue these points here.

I shall argue for a modified version of (iii).[56]

There is not sufficient textual evidence to support the view that Fyodor actually "narrates" his own history, in the proper sense of uttering – and even less *writing* – the totality of the discourses that we encounter in the novel. But neither can he be regarded as a conventional C-agent, if the latter notion is taken to denote merely the source of passive "perceptions" upon the narrated reality. (This at least was the function that we previously attributed to C in the standard hierarchy of the narrative text [1.1.1.].)

Rather, we should maintain that Fyodor is an agent who is struggling to *overstep* the limitations imposed by his status, consciously aspiring towards the controlling position of N.[57] *The Gift* is shaped according to the model of *Künstlerroman* in that it meticulously records the development of its protagonist from a novice into a full-fledged artist, capable at the end of creating the actual narrative himself (a scheme applied from Goethe and Dickens to Proust and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist*).[58] But the novel also differs from its antecedents in *showing the hero's mind already at work on the creative task during the process of his artistic apprenticeship.* It is the systematic emphasis on this mental activity that in part produces the unique narrative structure in *The Gift.*

On the other hand – and it is here that we shall diverge from (iii) – the text also includes covert reminders of the hero's incomplete control over the literary pattern that he is attempting to bring into being. There are instances in the novel in which Fyodor *no longer seems to comprehend* the full import of his perceptions and which in this way suggest the presence of another organizing consciousness behind the fictive mind.

As a consequence, the actual complexity of *The Gift* does not arise merely from the subordination of the narrated reality to the hero's point of view, but also from the simultaneous submission of the hero to a number of narratorial ironies. To somewhat stretch a famous definition, Fyodor represents a nearly paradigmatic example of a narrative "subject" as this concept was defined by BAKHTIN with regard to Dostoevskij's heroes: "a full-valued, full-fledged carrier of his own private word" (1963, 3); but at the same time he is also "the object of the author's word" (*ibid*), whose discourse remains open to various manipulations throughout the entire length of the novel.

The narrative modes called forth by this paradoxical situation can now be looked into in more detail.[59]

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56. Cf. also the previous classification of the novel as N_E-text with *covert* narratorial SR. *Table 1* (1.2.5.).

57. Also FIELD has pointed out that "Fyodor [. . .] appears in the novel as a character midway between an author's 'I' and a more removed 'he' " (1967, 243), but he does not elaborate the idea any further.

58. For remarks on this scheme from a narrative-theoretical standpoint cf. GENETTE 1972, 226–7; STANZEL 1982, 80–3 *passim.*

59. I ignore in this connection the question to what degree the narration in the novel is "contaminated" by Fyodor's point of view. There undoubtedly exists a large number of segments in *The Gift* that represent more or less standard instances of *style indirect libre* (some of those were exemplified in our above survey: cf. exs. [10], [21], [46] among others). But these are not important for our task of determining the actual narrative *source* of these segments.

CD_1: The Hero as Subject

Fyodor can be regarded as the *subject* of the discourse, first, in all textual segments that are presented as direct quotations of his mental language, but which still omit signs of deliberate literary ordering on the part of his reflecting mind. These are, in other terms, standard instances of "Joycean" interior monologue, commonly used in rendering the processes belonging to C-agent's consciousness. We shall apply the digit (1) to differentiate this mode from the other narrative forms in the novel.

A typical example is seen in the handling of Fyodor's erotic ruminations as he wavers on the threshold of Zina's bedchamber:

> [79] He stood for another moment – and on tiptoe stole into his room. [CD_1] All in all, French emotions. Fama mour.[60] Sleep, sleep – the heaviness of spring is utterly untalented. Take oneself in hand: a monastic pun. What next? What exactly are we waiting for? In any case I won't find a better wife. But do I need a wife at all? 'Put that lyre away. I've no room to move . . .' No, I would never hear that from her – that's the point.
> (309)

Similarly abrupt glides from indirect narration into CD_1 are illustrated by Fyodor's mental experimentations with rhyming as he wanders along the Berlin streets:

> [80] He decided he could already set off for the Chernyshevskis' so as to be there towards nine. [CD_1] Rhine, fine, cline.
> (36)
>
> [81] This was a conversation with a thousand interlocutors, only one of whom was genuine, and this genuine one must be caught and kept within hearing distance. [CD_1] How difficult this is, and how wonderful . . . and in these talks between tamtambles, tamtam my spirit hardly knows. . . .
> (59)

Or by his other verbal responses to a profusion of outside stimuli (cf. also above exs. [70]–[72]; there are additional instances e.g. on 11, 13, 36, 57, 83, 153, 169, 311, 339):

> [82] When Fyodor went outside he felt immersed in a damp chill [CD_1] (it's a good thing I put that on).
> (34)
>
> [83] He carried [his new shoes] off to his lesson under his arm, came home, ate, put them on, admiring them apprehensively, and left for the meeting.
> [CD_1] They do seem all right after all – for an agonizing beginning.
> (67)
>
> [84] [. . .] a blind man, sitting with a concertina against a stone wall mumbled his small request for alms and squeezed out a polygon of music as if there were nothing out of the way [CD_1] (it was odd, though – surely he must have heard that I was barefoot).
> (328)

CD_2: The Hero as the Creative Subject

Not all of Fyodor's reflections are given in such an immediate form. When his monologue is made to disclose a more ordered pattern, a second type of CD (2) becomes manifest in

60. During the Emigré Writers' meeting on the same day Fyodor has already reflected on the fact that the pseudonym chosen by one of his colleagues – "Foma Mur" – contains "a complete French novel (*femme, amour*), a page of English literature (Thomas Moore), and a touch of Jewish scepticism (Thomas the Apostle)" (305). This associative leap is entirely characteristic of the "Joycean" manner.

the novel. We may talk here of mental language on which the hero exerts a rigid stylistic control, or which he in effect *creates* for a specifically "literary" purpose.

Here is one fairly representative excerpt, taken from the rhapsodic description of Fyodor's final visit to the Grunewald forest (for the comprehensive section cf. 313–16):

> [85] The forest as I found it was still alive, rich, full of birds. There occurred orioles, pigeons and jays; a crow flew by, its wings panting: *kshoo, kshoo, kshoo;* a redheaded woodpecker was rapping against a pine trunk – and sometimes, I presume, imitating its own rap vocally whereupon it came out particularly loud and convincingly (for the female's benefit); for there is nothing in nature more bewitchingly divine than her ingenious deceptions cropping up in unexpected places [. . .]
> (313)

The proliferation of features normally associated with memoiristic narration – first-person pronominal reference, past tense of the verb, stylization, even narratorial "digressions" (on "nature's deceptions") – in this and similar passages (cf. also above exs. [64]–[66] and [67]–[69]) has led critics to read the entire narrative as a straightforward memoir by the hero. Still, the text includes also some definite clues to the contrary, enabling us to qualify further the status of his discourse.

One of these clues has occurred at an earlier point in the novel, as Fyodor discusses his literary ambitions with Zina: "It's queer, *I seem to remember my future works* [. . .] I'll recall them completely and write them" (186; my emphasis). Wandering about Berlin he again reflects on the fact that "[the streets] had [. . .] purchased in advance, *in his future memories,* space next to St. Petersburg, an adjacent grave" (56; my emphasis). In his work on Chernyshevski he refers to a corresponding phenomenon in terms of "*a future recollection*" (216; my emphasis), and also the afore-cited Grunewald-section is prefaced by a related reference, as Fyodor muses on the impressions offered by his walk through the forest: "Where shall I put all these gifts with which the summer morning rewards me – and only me? Save them up *for future books?* (311; my emphasis). It is suggested, briefly, that segments like ex. [85] are best understood as deriving from Fyodor's deliberate mental training for his career as a writer: as sustained experiments in remodeling experience into a set of "future recollections" that may one day be appropriated as materials in his artistic texts.[61] The excerpt typically concludes with a shift back to indirect narration, marking the termination of the hero's reverie and specifying the circumstances in which it was conceived: "Fyodor raised himself and sat up [. . .]" (316).[62]

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61. The motif of a "future recollection" keeps cropping up in various contexts in Nabokovian writing. Compare "Torpid Smoke", where it is quite similarly used to exemplify the creative exercises of an aspiring young author:

    > With terrifying clarity, as if my soul were lit up by a noiseless explosion, I glimpsed a future recollection [. . .]
    > (*RB,* 33)

    Or *Look at the Harlequins!:*

    > The forefeel of fame was as heady as the old wines of nostalgia. It was remembrance in reverse, a great lakeside oak reflected so picturesquely in such clear waters that its mirrored branches looked like glorified roots.
    > (23)

62. Cf. our earlier example from "An Affair of Honor": "Anton Petrovich [. . .] got up [. . .]. Such things don't happen in real life" (above [63]).

From a narratological standpoint, the result is a wholly anomalous variant of "interior monologue". For here the mode customarily regarded as the one suited for rendering the subconscious layers of C-agent's mind[63] is used precisely at those moments when the hero is at his most conscious, striving himself to take verbal control over the raw materials of experience.

We should mark down some of the most striking uses of CD_2 in the novel.

(i) While nominally soliloquizing ("[. . .] reciting a fictitious dialogue with [him]self [. . .]" [78]), Fyodor may nevertheless address his mental discourse to a hypothetical "reader", for instance at the outset of the Grunewald-episode:

> [86] Give me your hand, dear reader, and let's go to the forest together.
> (313)

Or to introduce the epitaph to his two-year stay in Frau Stoboy's household:

> [87] Have you ever happened, reader, to feel that subtle sorrow at parting with an unloved abode?
> (140)

(ii) In the imaginary biography of his father he may also refer to his acts of "writ[ing]" (108; cf. other instances on 157 and 199), or to "[the] present work" (110), even though it is clearly indicated that the main body of the work in question was never committed to paper (e.g. the references to "scattered first drafts" [123] and "half-crossed-out sentences" [135]).[64]

(iii) Like any writer, he may even indulge in humorously self-parodic "baring" of the devices used in his mental compositions. This is a strategy taken up later with considerable vengeance in Fyodor's published work on Chernyshevski (Chapter Four): there seem to be no significant stylistic divergences between his private and public discourses. Compare:

> [88] Merrily, to coin a phrase, youngsters romp on a frosty day.[65]
> (25)
>
> [89] Winter, like most memorable winters and like all winters introduced for the sake of narrational phrase, turned out (they always 'turn out' in such cases) to be cold.[66]
> (195)
>
> [90] 'Oh that's less interesting', said Fyodor [during the imaginary dialogue with

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63. Some earlier accounts of the mode have gone so far as to demand that narrative presentations of C-agent's thoughts should lack all overt markers of stylization. Cf. BOWLING 1950, 336, 338–9; HUMPHREY 1954, 1–9, 24–5. For a useful summary of previous theoretical positions see CHATMAN 1978, 181–94. *The Gift* illustrates a diametrically opposed strategy – not accounted for even in the otherwise very complete survey by COHN 1978; cf. esp. the chapter "Problematic Presentation", 175–81 and *passim*.

64. Notice that only the brief, 11-line fragment on page 125 purports to be written by Fyodor. The section is carefully separated from the rest of the discourse with quotation marks: " 'My father', wrote Fyodor [. . .]".

65. *The Life of Chernyshevski:* "Young people, as the phrase goes, would get together" (219).

66. *The Life of Chernyshevski:* "He was buried in the Volkov cemetery 'in a simple oak coffin' (the coffin in such cases is always simple)" (250).

> Koncheyev], who *during this tirade* (as Turgenev, Goncharov, Count Salias, Grigorovich and Boborykin used to write) had been nodding his head with an approving *mien.*[67]
> (322; emphasis in the text)

(iv) In addition, the deceptively literary quality of Fyodor's monologues is foregrounded through purely verbal devices: phonetic play, alliteration, rhyme, and other effects suggesting a rather extraordinary stylistic control on the part of the reflecting consciousness. An illustrative excerpt again occurs in connection with the Grunewald-rhapsody, comprising within a framework of only a few clauses a rich overlay of consonance (*b/p, f/v, n/m,* and so forth), assonance and internal rhyme ("low rowans"/"oak"/"broke", "dapple"/"overlapping", "settled"/"mottled"), or even a distinct rhythm of its own:[68]

> [91] Farther on it became very nice: the pines had come into their own, and between their pinkish, scaly trunks the feathery foliage of low rowans and the vigorous greenery of oak broke the stripiness of the pinewood sun into an animated dapple. In the density of an oak, when you looked from below, the overlapping of shaded and illumined leaves, dark green and bright emerald, seemed to be a jigsaw fitting together of their wavy edges, and on these leaves, now letting the sun caress its yellow-brown silk and now tightly closing its wings, there settled an Angle Wing butterfly with a white bracket on its dark mottled underside [. . .]
> (314)

(v) On a larger scale, the same control is manifested through hidden compositional symmetries between the separate CD_2-sections distributed in the text. It is more than a coincidence that the invented "architect Ferdinand Stockschmeisser", making an initial appearance in the history of Yasha Chernyshevski's suicide ("[. . .] the little man [. . .] tossing his stick into the water at the request of his dog" [51–2]), figures also in the margin of the section on Grunewald (cf. 314), purportedly conceived more than three years after the initial episode.[69]

This stylized play goes on until the concluding paragraph of the novel, where the hero's mental discourse is finally adapted to a rigid formal-stanzaic scheme, while at the same

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67. This is one of the numerous literary parodies encased within Fyodor's discourse. Cf. also:
> Down the helical stairs of the bus that drew up came a pair of charming silk legs: we know of course that this has been worn threadbare by the efforts of a thousand male writers, but nevertheless down they came, these legs [. . .].
> (157)

Although the "male writers" are not identified here, it would seem that at least one source for the parody is provided by Pushkin's famous "pedal digression" in One: XXX of *Evgenij Onegin.* "Ah me, I long could not forget/two little feet [. . .]" (*EO* 1, 108); VN has devoted considerable attention to this passage in his Commentary to the poem (*EO* 2, 115–16, 120–35). Pushkin's life and work function as a major subtext throughout the novel (KARLINSKY 1963; HYDE 1977, 21–3; JOHNSON 1982c, 191–2, 203–5), and the literary model is also perceptible behind many of the hero's seemingly spontaneous monologues. In his first colloquy with Koncheyev Fyodor terms Pushkin "the gold reserve of our literature" (74), and in preparing to undertake the biography of his father he again "hearken[s] to the purest sound of Pushkin's tuning fork" (97). See also below notes 70–1.

68. Fyodor has experimented with rhythmic prose elsewhere in his musings. Cf. "[. . .] now we switch to the prose-rhythm of Bely. [. . .] Muse of Russian prose-rhythm! Say farewell forever to the cabbage dactylics of the author of *Moscow*" (152).

69. "Stockschmeisser" = "stick-tosser". The comedy name is used to underline the fictitious status of the character even from Fyodor's subjective viewpoint.

time the various thematic strands in the narrative are brought together. It is not necessary to assign the conclusion to an extrinsic "author" – as some critics have done – for the narrative follows its own logic. During the period of his creative training Fyodor has persisted in organizing his experience according to a literary pattern, and as his apprenticeship is nearing its end he feels free to reflect upon the process in terms of a finished "text" – or a "book" that he is now ready to begin writing. I have added the line-divisions:[70]

> [92] Good-bye, my book! Like mortal eyes,/imagined ones must close some day./ Onegin from his knees will rise/– but his creator strolls away./And yet the ear cannot right now/part with the music and allow/the tale to fade; the chords of fate/itself continue to vibrate;/and no obstruction for the sage/exists where I have put The End:/the shadows of my world extend/beyond the skyline of the page,/blue as tomorrow's morning haze/ – nor does this terminate the phrase.[71]

ND: The Hero as Object

Fyodor should be regarded as the *object* of an extrinsic narratorial discourse whenever a textual segment carries indices of not being fully governed by his reflecting mind.

How are we to determine whether the hero's consciousness is responsible for a given patch of the discourse? It was just noticed that the creative control given to Fyodor is quite unusual for a C-agent, who is not normally thought to regard his own experience as part of a literary text. We have also seen that some recent discussions of *The Gift* have tended to describe the text as an uninterrupted "stream of consciousness", containing no elements unavailable to the hero.[72] Still, neither is this reading sufficient to cover the entire scope of the novel.

The following interchange between Mme Shchyogolev and Zina near the conclusion

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70. VN points out himself in his Foreword (*G*, 9) that the epilogic "poem" observes the classic scheme of an *Onegin*-stanza. For his own description of the scheme cf. *EO* 1, 9–14. When ex. [92] was later included in *Stikhi* 1979 (cf. 317) the original Russian text was printed in a stanzaic form.

71. The "skyline of the page" -trope once more correlates with sections of Fyodor's discourse elsewhere in the novel. "Even if any of [the themes] should fly away, beyond the horizon of my page, I am not perturbed" (226), he writes in his Chernyshevski-biography. In an earlier passage he has told Zina that he likes –

    horizons most of all, and diminishing dashes beneath it.
    (185; cf. also 196)

    In addition, the conclusion alludes to Pushkin's well-known speculations on his hero's fate outside the framework of *Onegin*. In his Commentary to the unfinished "Chapter Ten" of the poem VN recapitulates the same notion when he refers to "the destiny of an author's creature beyond the horizon of a discontinued romance" (*EO* 3, 311; cf. also 376–8 *passim*). A closely related subtext had been applied by VN in his first novel. *Mary*, too, contains an epigraph taken from *Onegin* ("*vospomnja prezhnykh let romany,/vospomnja prezhnuju ljubov*' " [*M* R, 7]; "Having recalled intrigues of former years/having recalled a former love" [*M*, ix]), and like *The Gift* it concludes with the hero's realization that by reliving in his mind his past romance he has in effect brought into being the narrative itself. The outcome is still enhanced by a play on the polysemous Russian term '*roman*' ('intrigue' or 'affair' as well as 'novel'): "*Ganin* [. . .] *chuvstvoval* [. . .] *chto roman ego s Mashen'koj konchilsja navsegda*" (*M* R, 168); "Ganin [. . .] realized [. . .] that his affair with Mary was ended forever" (*M*, 114).

72. *"We learn of the novel only what also [Fyodor] knows" (LEVIN 1981, 205). Cf. also the theory proposed by BEGNAL that the whole of the narrative is "controlled by the consciousness of Fyodor, not by the Nabokovian, third-person point of view" (1980, 138).

is not witnessed by Fyodor. (It is expressly told that he "wait[ed] [. . .] outside" [340] while Zina and her mother said their farewells.)

> [93] 'We'll miss you, Zina', said Marianna Nikolavna, from the window of the carriage. 'But in any case take your vacation in August and come over – we'll see if you can't perhaps stay for good.'
>
> 'I don't think so', said Zina. 'Ah yes, I gave you my keys today. Don't take them with you, please.'
>
> 'I left them in the hall . . . And Boris's are in the desk . . . Never mind: Godunov will let you in', added Marianna Nikolavna appeasingly.
> (*ibid*)

These seemingly random mentions receive their motivation from hidden correlations with other sections in the narrative (lost on any of its C-agents). Previously, the said keys have been observed by Fyodor through the postal slot, "lying starwise on the hall floor" (338) in the Shchyogolev apartment. In a still earlier passage the reason for his failure to use his own keys has been indicated – with a deceptive casualness – as the items lost during his swim in the Grunewald lake are detailed:

> [94] Fyodor wandered all around finding no one and nothing. [. . .] Together with the trousers had gone twenty marks, obtained two days before for at least partial payment of his room. Also gone were a small pencil, a handkerchief, and a bunch of keys. The latter somehow was worst of all.
> (326–7)

From this it follows that when Fyodor subsequently waxes lyrical in his mind on his future night with Zina, his musings disclose an ironic gap between the elevated rhetoric and the discovery that awaits him in prosaic actuality: "Will it really happen tonight? Will it really happen now? The weight and the threat of bliss. [. . .] And one day we shall recall all this – the lindens, and the shadow on the wall [. . .] And the star, the star" (346). The only available keys to the apartment were also lying "starwise" on the floor, and as the novel draws to a close – as the two lovers are being led to spend their night outside the locked door – the hero is unexpectedly left in a position that renders him a helpless object in the narrative game played beyond his purview.[73]

There are other sections in the text in which Fyodor's mind is shown to possess an incomplete hold over perceived reality. An all but overt instance occurs during his first visit to the hospitalized A.Ya. Chernyshevski in Chapter Two. The emphases indicate N-agent's, rather than the hero's own, interpolations:

> [95] [. . .] walking over the variegated gravel between myrtle shrubs resembling furniture *and taking the visitors he passed for paranoiacs,* troubled Fyodor kept pondering over the fact that the misfortune of the Chernyshevskis appeared to be a kind of mocking variation on the theme of his own hope-suffused grief, *and only much later did he understand the full refinement of the corollary and all the irreproachable compositional balance with which these collateral sounds had been included in his own life.*
> (93)

We may also cite the following excerpt from the opening of the novel, indicating that while Fyodor has already begun planning his literary project he – unlike "somebody

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73. VN extends the game in his Foreword by slyly wondering "how far the imagination of the reader will follow the young lovers" (8). It is suggested, in effect, that any reader failing to perceive the implanted references will himself fall prey to the same ironies as the hapless hero.

within him" – does not yet fully comprehend the overall pattern:

> [96] Some day, he thought, I must use such a scene to start a good thick old-fashioned novel. The fleeting thought was touched with a careless irony; *an irony, however, that was quite unnecessary, because somebody within him, on his behalf, independently from him, had absorbed all this, recorded it, and filed it away.*[74]
> (11–12; emphasis as above)

Distribution of the Shifts

On the basis of these discriminations we should be able to induce some more far-reaching rules with regard to the narrative system in *The Gift*.

The novel comprises a large number of *shifts* between diverse forms of discourse: autobiographic and biographic presentation; auctorial narration mottled with recurrent intrusions of a lyrical "I"; verse; literary criticism; dialogue; plus a gamut of intricately stylized interior monologues. Contrary to what has been claimed by most critics, however, these alternations do not bear directly on the identity of N (who remains extrinsic to the narrated reality all through the novel), but rather on the *narrative mode* applied in a given segment.

In principle, we have classified as CD all portions of the text containing first-person references. These include standard renderings of the hero's thought (exs. [79]–[84]) as well as numerous instances in which the hero is seen to be himself couching his monologues in a literary form (exs. [85]–[92]). In either case it is assumed that the discourse is verbalized directly in the hero's own mind. At the same time, the text was seen to incorporate at least some segments that cannot be assigned to the hero, suggesting N-agent's control behind the total design of the narrative (exs. [93]–[96]).

While it may not be altogether practicable to attempt placing *every* section in the text to one of these groups, we may still attempt extending the latter observation somewhat further. Insofar as "third-person" references to Fyodor's physical activities (i.e. "Fyodor wandered all around" in ex. [94]) or to his mental functions ("Fyodor kept pondering" [95], "Some day, he thought" [96]), are here regarded as ND, it would appear that in terms of mere text-length this is still the predominant mode in the narrative. There are large blocks of indirect narration in *The Gift* that are not readily ascribable to the hero's verbalizing efforts: the description of Fyodor's preparations for the book on his father in Chapter Two (79–99); the history of his acquaintance with Zina and of his subsequent work on the Chernyshevski-biography in Chapter Three (171–202); the account of the Emigré Writers' meeting in the final chapter (296–308). In all, more than one half of the novel adheres to the indirect mode. For classificatory purposes we shall here read all such instances as deriving from the auctorial N, unless the text clearly indicates otherwise. (The latter is the case at least with the second imaginary dialogue with Koncheyev on 320–5; above ex. [90].)

In this way, *The Gift* emerges as a complex patchwork of narrative fragments, alternately promoting the creative capacity of C – at places allowing his mind full control over the stylistic texture of the narrative – and again playing down his aspirations towards authorship through covert narratorial inlays. The approximate scope of the system is presented in *Table 2*.

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74. In addition, we might surmise that the epigraph, which is also a part of the novel (cf. 11), is chosen by "somebody" beyond Fyodor's purview.

Table 2.
Distribution of ND and CD in *The Gift*.

Chapter \ Fragment	ND	CD_1	CD_2
I	26	26	20
II	9	1	8
III	13	5	8
IV	*The Life of Chernyshevski*		
V	18	11	7

Thematic Import (Breaking Out of the Circle)

What is the significance of this elaborate compositional play? Why couldn't *The Gift* be narrated as a frankly autobiographic account, since it is towards the status of a "memoiristic" N that the hero is striving in many of his mental improvisations? Or, since the hero's reflecting consciousness still appears central to the narrative, why couldn't the discourse be presented in its entirety as his interior monologue, with no intervention of the auctorial voice?[75]

The Gift is a typically Nabokovian text in the sense that its main problematics come to concern *the status of the text itself* as a literary work. The author is not merely interested in tracing the psychological development of his writer-hero, but also in exploring the processes that underlie all novelistic construction. It is this metaliterary concern that finally effects the hero's double role as both "the subject" and "the object" of the discourses presented in the novel.

In the course of the history Fyodor's mind is seen to make a number of false starts, as they were, to assume control over the narrative in which he himself functions as C. Already in the second paragraph of the novel he is planning to appropriate the materials occurring in the first one "to start a good thick old-fashioned novel" (11; cf. above ex. [96]). In the concluding chapter he is again outlining to Zina his project for a voluminous

75. Or, to take these cogitations still further, why isn't the novel wholly couched in a flexible mixture of ND+CD, with perhaps the hero's own voice taking over in the conclusion, as is the case with Stephen Dedalus's diary entries on the final pages of the Joycean *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man?* We might notice that this particular model of narrative construction has been overtly parodied in *Despair* where Hermann Karlovich considers entitling his manuscript "Portrait of the Artist in a Mirror" (211) and further laments that the tale is in danger of "degenerat[ing] into a diary" (218). Humbert Humbert again refers to his narrative as "the portrait of the artist as a younger brute" (*L*, 255), while VN has himself asserted that he "never liked *A Portrait of the Artist*", which he finds "a feeble and garrulous book" (*SO*, 71). It is remarkable, I think, that although the apprenticeship of an artist remains one of the staple topics in the author's fiction he has always insisted on twisting and parodically deforming the devices found in a traditional *Künstlerroman*.

work that will duplicate the precise plot-line of *The Gift* itself (343–4). A related scheme has been announced also in the letter addressed to Mme Godunov-Cherdyntsev:

> [97] [. . .] and now I am completely empty, clean, and ready to receive new lodgers. [. . .] Something is beginning to take shape – I think I'll write a classical novel, with 'types', love, fate, conversations . . . [. . .] and descriptions of nature.
> (330–1)

In these plans, a crucial part is reserved for the notion of covert "themes" unifying a literary narrative. Fyodor's *The Life of Chernyshevski* is in its entirety based on the idea. Express attention is drawn here by Fyodor to "the theme of 'writing exercises' " resurfacing at various phases of Chernyshevski's life (205; cf. also 283). The same is done with "the theme of 'nearsightedness' " (205) or of " 'angelic clarity' " (*ibid*); "the theme of 'travelling' " (*ibid*); "the theme of tears" (211); "the theme of pastry shops" (216); "the theme of 'officers' " (223); and so forth. "The motifs of Chernyshevski's life are now obedient to me – I have tamed its themes [. . .]" (226), Fyodor writes at still another point, specifying the notion with explicit references to "rare correlations that constitute the researcher's pride" (273) or to –

> [98] [a] coincidence of anniversaries, a card index of dates. That is how fate sorts them in anticipation of the researcher's needs [. . .]
> (210)

In a fully analogous manner, Fyodor is elsewhere shown conceiving of his own life-history as a carefully ordered structure. "Now isn't that the plot for a remarkable novel? What a theme! " (344), as he summarizes his three-year apprenticeship to Zina.[76] Previously he has reflected on the fact that the father-son relationship between Alexander and Yasha Chernyshevski "appeared to be a kind of mocking variation on the theme of his own hope-suffused grief" (93; above ex. [95]), and it would not be difficult to follow many of the other covert "themes" as they keep reoccurring in the margins of the narrated life.[77]

In addition, it was noticed that Fyodor's life-history comprises correlations between incidents that he himself fails to notice (i.e. the "theme of keys" providing the novel with an unexpected trick-ending; exs. [93]–[94]). I would suggest that this is not just a joke at the expense of the fictive hero, for through such manipulations the author

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76. One may be reminded here that VN has himself defined as the main task of his personal memoir "the following of [. . .] thematic designs through one's life" (*SM*, 27). For our previous discussion of the importance given to "designs" and "correlations" in Nabokovian poetics see above Introduction (0.4.).

77. The gradual manner in which the identity of Fyodor's beloved is disclosed in the narrative is characteristic. While the first explicit reference to "Zina Mertz" occurs as early as the first chapter (62; for other anticipations cf. 85, 138, 142, 145, 150), she is directly identified only some hundred pages later, and even then the reference is encased within a sonorous pun: "What shall I call you? Half-Mnemo*syne*? There's a half-shim*mer* in your surname too [. . .]" (151–2; emphasis in the text). In the Russian original the phonetic effect comes off with a still greater perfection: "*Kak zvat' tebja? Ty polu-Mnemo*zina, *polu*-mer*can'e v imeni tvoem*" (*G* R, 176; my emphases). The handling of the "theme of Zina" (cf. also 343–4) is hence closely comparable to the game played by VN himself with the name of *his* boyhood love – "Tamara" – throughout Chapters Eleven and Twelve in *Speak, Memory* (216, 225, 229 *passim*).

manages to reveal something about the role of narrative-making in man's life on the whole.

The narrative in *The Gift* is organized in the form of a circle. Its conclusion quite directly anticipates the opening, for when Fyodor envisions in the final chapter the writing of his future work, he remains unaware that "somebody within him, on his behalf" (12; above ex. [96]) has already completed the task. Similarly, while he strives to perceive his immediate reality in terms of a completed "book", he becomes himself enmeshed in a larger text that he can no longer fully comprehend. The situation is aptly telescoped in Fyodor's own phrase, as he reconstructs for himself the hypothetical "last thoughts" of dying. A.Ya. Chernyshevski:

> [99] Of course I am dying. [. . .] Funny that I have thought of death all my life, and if I have lived, have lived *only in the margin of a book I have never been able to read.*[78]
> (295; my emphasis)

In other instances the text incorporates some quite explicit references to the circular notion, allowing us to further determine its import. Discoursing on his literary projects Fyodor mentions the possibility of composing a narrative "in the shape of a ring [. . .] so that the result would be not the form of a book, which by its finiteness is opposed to the circular nature of everything in existence, but a continuously curving, and thus infinite, sentence" (196). In his Chernyshevski-book he again takes care to point out that the "themes [of the depicted life] [. . .] describe a circle" (226), and also the mental narrative concerning Yasha Chernyshevski's suicide is termed "a triangle inscribed in a circle" (47). Neither is it for nothing that in his second imaginary dialogue with Koncheyev Fyodor has his interlocutor discourse at some length on the seemingly unrelated facts that –

> [100] nature was seeing double when she created us [. . .], that symmetry in the structure of live bodies is a consequence of the rotation of worlds [. . .], that in our straining towards asymmetry, towards inequality, [one] can detect *a howl for genuine freedom, an urge to break out of the circle . . .*
> (324–5; my emphasis)

May we conclude, then, with a suggestion that the emblematic "circle" which the hero of *The Gift* is striving to complete in his creative exercises, and from which he is at the same time trying to escape, is constituted by nothing if not by the structure of the Nabokovian narrative itself? One might wish to specify this reading by pointing out that what keeps Fyodor from performing his feat (i.e. he does not become "the author" of the actual novel) is not so much the immaturity of his literary gift, as the limitations imposed on all such efforts by the boundaries of human consciousness. This is a notion

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78. A still more tangible example of the circular structure is presented in *The Life of Chernyshevski*, where the narrative opens with the last six lines of an epigraphic "sonnet" (203) the beginning of which is given only in the conclusion (285). Thus both the book that Fyodor actually composes as well as the one in which he himself functions as C tie together their extreme ends with an analogous compositional device. In his prefatory remarks to "The Circle" the author has described a similar pattern as the "serpent-biting-its-tail type [of] [. . .] structure" (*RB*, 254). For comments on the circle-motif cf. also JOHNSON 1982c, 192–3 and DAVYDOV 1982, 194–5 *passim*.

that will recur in each of the discussed novels.[79] But the principal point of *The Gift* is still this: as long as Fyodor is trying to gain control over a reality *of which his own mind is a part,* he will never be fully successful as a literary artist. Imprisoned by his self, he cannot hope to conceive "reality" because the process involves an infinite regress. Each of the perceptions transmitted in the novel is subordinated to a higher act of narration, which once again conjoins the hero's particular mode of perceiving the world. It is only when he himself assumes the position of a full-fledged "author" with regard to his reality – i.e. when he abandons his status as a created character altogether – that Fyodor may finally attain his artistic freedom.[80]

2.2. *Foregrounding of ND: Nabokov's Anti-Polyphonic Narrative*

2.2.1. The Problem of Polyphony, Monologism, and Anti-Polyphony

In the foregoing discussion we have traced one of the salient tendencies running through VN's prose fiction. Underlying the author's narrative practice there is a consistent effort to replace the notion of a commonly shared "reality" with a more complex model: *a vision of reality as a compound of subjective assessments, beliefs, or illusions that are wholly dependent on a chosen point of view.* The attendant novelistic strategies were seen to range from standard uses of *style indirect libre* to deceptive types of play with the precise borderline between ND and CD, such manipulations culminating in *The Gift,* where the hero is made to vie outright with N for the creative privilege in the novel.

Since our examination of these problems was begun from an avowedly "Bakhtinian" perspective, it might now seem tempting to take the above line of analysis still further. Could we not go on the relate the studied devices to the larger notion of *polyphony* in fiction, formulated by Bakhtin on the basis of Dostoevskij's novels, and often treated in contemporary criticism precisely in terms of the coexistence of multiple viewpoints within a single narrative?

I would argue at the outset that such a temptation is to be resisted in a study of Nabokovian narration. We all know, for one, that after the recent discovery of Bakhtin's writings it has become somewhat overly modish to evoke his concepts in narratological analysis. Virtually any novelist may nowadays be labeled as a representative of the polyphonic mode, with the result that this notion no longer serves a truly distinctive

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79. Compare the explicit comment in another Nabokovian novel on "human thoughts [which], admirably coordinated though they may be, cannot escape the confines of their private circle of hell" (*KQKn,* 225).

80. Therefore, after all is said and done, one may once again speculate whether the narrative *was* written by Fyodor once he had become a mature artist. But the question is no longer interesting from the standpoint of narrative categorization, for in this case it must still be assumed that the history is a "fiction". The possibility is teasingly offered in Fyodor's own words to Zina: "[. . .] let's suppose that I so shuffle, twist, mix, rechew and rebelch everything [. . .] that nothing remains of the autobiography but dust – the kind of dust, of course, which makes the most orange of skies" (344–5).

purpose.[81] Secondly, and more importantly, we should notice that were one to concentrate solely on the role given to C-agent's discourse in the present corpus, this would be to ignore a powerful counter-tendency, assuming a variety of forms throughout Nabokovian fiction. VN is no Dostoevskij, and a closer examination of his prose will bring out a whole array of devices that are incompatible with genuinely polyphonic ordering. The range and function of these devices will constitute our main object of analysis here.

At the same time – it will be further argued – the concept of polyphony itself does not lose its workability, for it is specifically through a negative parallel with this notion that many of VN's own narrative idiosyncracies can be better understood. I shall therefore proceed by contrasting some overt statements by VN and Bakhtin, in which two divergent approaches to the art of the novel are promulgated.

Bakhtin on Polyphony

How did Bakhtin initially define his concept? Let us recall a few famous passages from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics:*

> Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel [. . .] is not constructed as the entirety of a single consciousness which absorbs other consciousnesses as objects, but rather as the entirety of the interaction of several consciousnesses, of which no one fully becomes the object of any other one.
> (BAKHTIN 1963, 14)

> This new [. . .] authorial position [. . .] allows the complete and independent unfolding of the heroes' points of view. Each character *freely* (without the author's interference) develops and substantiates the validity of his own position [. . .]
> (55; Bakhtin's emphasis)

> Dostoevsky [. . .] creates not voiceless slaves [. . .] but rather *free* people who are capable of standing *beside* their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him.
> (4; emphasis as above)

Now, while the full import of these assertions may be open to debate – has, in fact, been under constant debate in contemporary literary scholarship[82] – from a strictly narratological standpoint the gist of the matter would appear to be the following: a "polyphonic novel" is not simply a narrative containing multiple points of view (which is a common case in all fiction), but one seemingly governed by no "author", or no auctorial consciousness,[83] at all. It is by obliterating the markers of its own construction that the polyphonic novel goes about staging an illusion of autonomous world-views that are derived directly from inside the narrated reality.

Elsewhere, Bakhtin has compared his polyphonic model to a world functioning along the lines of Einstein's relativity principle (*ibid,* 12; cf. also 229), and the analogy is not

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81. Some time ago, an entire book was published to support the claim – and it is a dubious one – that even Solzhenicyn's novels may be regarded as variations of the mode. See KRASNOV 1980, esp. 1–12.

82. For varying approaches to the Bakhtinian notion see discussions by USPENSKY 1970, 10–11 *passim;* KRISTEVA 1970b, 88–93; IVANOV 1973, 331–6; TITUNIK 1976; MORSON 1978; PESONEN 1980, 43–7; BOOTH 1983, 496–7. Cf. also TITUNIK (1981, 10) where former Bakhtinologists are expressly taken to task for "distortion and misuse" of the initial model.

83. I would still insist here on talking about *a specifically auctorial type of N* (N_E).

an entirely far-fetched one. For what is being shadowed forth here is a new, "super-realistic" conception of the narrative text, in which each of the agents is regarded as an independent member.[84] This does not necessarily require that all references to auctorial N be effaced from the text. As Bakhtin points out, he is not concerned "with the absence, but with *the radical alteration of the author's position*" (55; his emphasis). Rather, it becomes necessary that N is deprived of his status as the governing "creator" behind the illusion. He is no longer allowed to flaunt his imaginative control over the unfolding of the discourse, nor is he granted any insights into the narrated reality that overtly supersede those of his fictive C-agents (56–9 *passim*). Bakhtin's summary-phrase with regard to the narrative in *Crime and Punishment* well telescopes the main condition set for this mode. According to his formulation:

> The author retains for himself no essential superiority of information and enters *as Raskolnikov's equal* into the great dialog that is the novel.
> (62; my emphasis)

In this sense, the polyphonic novel can be described as one *in which the subordination of CD to ND always remains covert,* or as one in which N-agent's control is never singled out as an explicitly formulated concern in the discourse.[85]

Nabokov on Anti-Polyphony

Turning to statements made by VN on the subject of creative control in novelistic discourse, one finds an instructive correspondence – an "inner polemic", to make use of still another well-known concept – with the very notions that were just recorded above. (I am not claiming, of course, that the author intended an actual "reply" to his famous contemporary, or that he even knew of the theories propounded by Bakhtin. But the correspondence is an instructive one nonetheless.)

Asked by an interviewer in 1966, for instance, whether he had ever felt as if he had been "taken hold of" by his fictive characters, VN had this to say:

> [101] I have never experienced this. What a preposterous experience! Writers who have had it must be very minor or insane. No, the design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth.
> (*SO*, 69)

In another interview, conducted the same year, VN jokingly likened the situation of his protagonists to that of "galley slaves" (*ibid*, 95) – the pun on "galley" reminding us also of the Bakhtinian notion of literary heroes as "not voiceless slaves [. . .], but [. . .] *free* people who are capable of standing *beside* their creator" (cf. above). Still in his last public colloquy the author rehearsed this stand, dismissing the autonomy of a fictive

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84. Consequently, Dostoevskij is not lauded as a realist by Bakhtin, but as "a realist in a higher sense" (1963, 49).

85. Whether particular narratives by Dostoevskij in fact adhere to this pattern is not the issue here. I am interested solely in the general model and its relation to VN's narrative practice. It has indeed been pointed out in a recent study of *Crime and Punishment* – in direct contradiction to Bakhtin – that "the points of view of the characters in [the novel] are subordinated to the higher point of view of the narrator" (ROSENSHIELD 1978, 127), and this argumentation seems to me quite persuasive.

protagonist with an apt metaphor:

> [102] The circus tiger is not obsessed by his torturer, my characters cringe as I come near with my whip. I have seen a whole avenue of imagined trees losing their leaves at the threat of my passage [. . .]
> (Interview 1977, 124–5)

The reiteration of these postulates at various points of the author's career amounts to a veritable campaign against the notion of polyphony in fiction. When, for Bakhtin, it is the obliteration of all overt auctorial control that provides the keyword for comprehending novelistic structure, VN keeps expounding the full subjection of the fictive world to the creative will of its maker. In prefacing his screenplay version of *Lolita* the author dwells at some length on this point. Had he been a playwright, he writes:

> [103] I would have advocated and applied a system of total tyranny, directing the play or the picture myself, choosing settings and costumes, terrorizing the actors, mingling with them in the bit part of a guest, or ghost, prompting them, and, in a word, pervading the entire show with the will and art of one individual – for there is nothing in the world I hate more than group activity, that communal bath where the hairy and slippery mix in a multiplication of mediocrity.[86]
> (Foreword to *L* S, x)

Aspects of the same campaign are seen also in the author's notorious attacks on Dostoevskij (whose "sensitive murderers" and "soulful prostitutes", he has maintained, "are not to be endured for one moment" [*SO*, 42]).[87] Similarly, it is worth noticing in this context that admiration for Tolstoj – one of the arch-monologists according to BAKHTIN (1963, 45–6, 57–9) – is expressed by VN precisely for the unflagging narrative control exercised in his fiction. Discussing an episode from *Anna Karenina* VN comments with approval on –

> [104] the brilliant eye of the great writer always noting what his puppets are up to after he has given them power to live.
> (*Lectures 2*, 162)

While the latter assertion might seem to suggest an affinity between VN's artistic goals and the poetics of the classical novel, their intense accentuation also points beyond a mere Tolstoj- or Turgenev-type of "monologism". If Dostoevskij is seen to introduce "a wholly new type of artistic thought" (Foreword to BAKHTIN 1963, unpagin.), VN appears to us as a proponent of an equally radical program. We may talk of a pronouncedly *anti-polyphonic* feature in the author's writing: *an overriding tendency to make explicit the presence of a creative consciousness behind every fictive construction.*

It is to the narrative actualizations of this tendency that we shall now give our attention. I shall attempt to demonstrate that even when a multitude of viewpoints is

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86. So also Van Veen insists that "the written word exist[s] only in its abstract purity [. . .]. It belong[s] solely to its creator and [can] not be spoken or enacted by a mime [. . .] without letting the deadly stab of another's mind destroy the artist in the very lair of his art" (*A*, 425) – a most anti-Bakhtinian phrasing.

87. For a more reasoned exposition of this view see the lecture on Dostoevskij in *Lectures 2*, 97–135. Interestingly, Dostoevskij is here lauded for his skill as a "dramatist" (129–30), while no praise is reserved for his ability as a writer of fiction. Cf. also *Speak, Memory* on "Heart-to-heart talks, confessions in the Dostoevskian manner" (286), plus *EO* 3, 191–2; *Letters* (September 13, 1946), 172, (February 21, 1952), 272.

appropriated in the author's fiction, it is an essentially Nabokovian strategy to simultaneously downplay the created illusion of verisimilitude through reminders of N-agent's function in the total system of the text. The narrative becomes not only an orchestration of separate positions and world-views, but also a virtuoso performance by the teller, whose superiority over the fictive hero is always elevated into a central element of the presentation.[88]

2.2.2. A Survey of Foregrounded ND

2.2.2.1. On Foregrounding

What are the actual manifestations of VN's "anti-polyphonic" concerns on the plane of individual narratives? The author has again provided an accurate description of his own method in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin,* where he draws attention to the device of "authorial participation" in Pushkinian narration (*EO* 1, 19). As he points out, there are numerous moments in Pushkin's text when the unfolding of Onegin's life history is disrupted by segments of discourse that are devoted to N-agent's own background, or to the artistic principles that he has observed in composing the narrative (17–20). These instances, VN argues, are not to be skipped by the reader. The personality of the teller ("stylized Pushkin" [19]) is a seminal component in *Onegin,* and for this reason also the various digressions and interpolations in the narrative are "*as much part of the plot* as Onegin and Tatiana are" (*ibid;* my emphasis).

It is not difficult to notice that the author is here following a cue taken from Russian Formalist theoreticians of prose fiction. One is reminded particularly of SHKLOVSKIJ, who quite similarly asserted in his "*Parodijnyj roman*" ("The Parodic Novel") that "the plot of *Evgenij Onegin* is [. . .] not the romance of the hero with Tat'jana, but the fashioning of the [narrative] as produced by the introduction of interrupting digressions" (1921b, 57; cf. 1921a, 161).[89]

This affinity is not coincidental, for clearly the notions of "parody" or "baring of the device" (*obnazhenie prijoma,* SHKLOVSKIJ 1921a, 139), as they were first developed by the Formalists, lie close to the core of Nabokovian poetics of the novel. As in the case of Pushkin or Sterne, so also in VN's work a large variety of digressive techniques is used in setting the main tenor of the narration. And while the particular devices employed by the author may strike us as considerably more audacious than those occurring in *Evgenij Onegin,* their ultimate function still remains the same. What will repeatedly emerge as an essential concern in VN's fiction – fully comparable to the vicissitudes of the fictive heroes – is the story of the auctorial N-agent's creative labor behind the narrative surface. The assertion of one's own self through the fashioning of

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88. This tendency, one may assume, accounts for much of the opposition to VN's writing among Russian émigré critics, schooled on Dostoevskij's brand of psychological realism. The position is summed up by STRUVE when he writes that "what makes Nabokov [. . .] alien to the Russian literary tradition is his lack of sympathy with [. . .] *human beings as such* (1967, 54; my emphasis). Cf. also STRUVE 1934, 437. In an early review of *Glory* CETLIN expressly took the novel to task for its lack of "polyphony" (1933, 458).

89. The statement occurs in an essay devoted to the novelistic technique in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy.* For VN's own collation of Pushkin's "digressive spirit" and the strategies favored by Sterne cf. *EO* 2, 195.

the narrative will turn out to be the primary goal of all Nabokovian tellers.

Specifically such instances are indicated here when we refer to *foregrounding of ND* in the Nabokovian narrative.[90]

2.2.2.2. Markers of ND

Previously, we have listed related examples under the heading of narratorial "self-reference" (SR [above 1.2.3.]). In the most flagrant cases the references may be given an overtly parodic motivation, as in the afore-cited passage from *Laughter in the Dark*, where it is pointed out that the whole history might have remained untold "had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling" (5).[91] Similarly in the opening paragraph of "The Leonardo" we are introduced to an auctorial teller who, akin to a stage-manager, constructs the NW-plane of his narrative right before the eyes of the reader:

> [105] The objects that are being summoned assemble, draw near from different spots; in doing so, some of them have to overcome not only the distance of space but that of time: which nomad, you may wonder, is more bothersome to cope with, this one or that, the young poplar, say, that once grew in the vicinity but was cut down long ago, or the singled-out courtyard which still exists today but is situated far away from here? Hurry up, please. (*RB*, 11)

When the assembled illusion breaks up again at the conclusion of the story, the teller overtly takes up his attendant loss of all auctorial privilege. Creative control over a world, it is being suggested, can be exercised only as long as the fabric of fiction itself remains unbroken:

> [106] It is all over now. Alas, the objects I had assembled wander away. The young poplar dims and takes off – to return where it had been fetched from. The brick wall dissolves. The house draws in its little balconies one by one, then turns, and floats away. Everything floats away. Harmony and meaning vanish. The world again irks me with its variegated void.
> (24)

Basically the same suggestion may be brought about through a gamut of more indirect markers. The following types of foregrounded ND will be separately surveyed.[92]

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90. For the notion of foregrounding cf. MUKAŘOVSKY, who uses it to denote any "violation of the scheme" in a literary text (1948, 19 *passim*). In our case, the scheme violated will be that of objective, uninterrupted narrative exposition. The same notion has been formerly applied in a narratological sense by DOLEŽEL 1973a, 113 ff. The afore-cited study by Shklovskij is entirely devoted to the question. For additional comments cf. CHERNOV 1976, 20, 30, 34.

91. It is fitting that this, too, harks back to Pushkin. As VN has indicated in another context, it was "Pushkin, professional poet and Russian nobleman" who "used to shock the *beau monde* by declaring that he wrote for his own pleasure but published for the sake of money" (*SO*, 144). The statement is duplicated in VN's own voice in "*Lolita* and Mr. Girodias" (*SO*, 273), and once more in "Vasiliy Shishkov" (*TD*, 210).

92. For previous comments on narratorial foregrounding in VN's novels cf. the chapter entitled "The Intrusive Voice" in LOKRANTZ 1973, 13–40. Our discussions seldom overlap, however, for Lokrantz would appear to be mainly concerned with "intrusions" deriving from the memoiristic type of N (N_I), which is not the chief question addressed here. For additional comments see COUTURIER 1978, 175–6.

It is a common occurrence in any conventionally "monologic" narrative that phrases like *my hero* or *our friend* are applied by N with reference to one or another of his C-agents. Formerly chosen for particular censure by the proponents of novelistic objectivity,[93] this figure has always functioned as a regular element of Nabokovian prose style. The possessive may occur in an altogether straightforward form, as in: "Our young man" (NT; *TD,* 47); "Our dwarf" (PE; *RB,* 222); "Our travelers" (*IB,* 42), and so forth. It may be variously combined with evaluative epithets, signalling the attitude taken by N himself towards the hero: "My poor Romantovski"[94] (Leon; *RB,* 24); "My poor little Cincinnatus" (*IB,* 65); "Our ridiculous rival" (NT; *TD,* 49); "Our hot-headed uppergrader" (Cr; *RB,* 258); "Our two farcical schemers" (*KQKn,* 234). Or it may alternate with playful uses of nomenclature – as in "*Solus Rex*", where N overtly flaunts his freedom to denote the hero with any chosen cipher:

> [107] The present king (pre-accessionally, let us designate him as K in chess-notation) [. . .]
> (*RB,* 191)

Many of such instances represent in themselves little more than petrified formulae, derived by the author from the classical novel, but they may also occur with a more directly parodic function. The conventional basis of the figure is laid bare through the very frequency of its application e.g. in *Transparent Things,* where similar references range from standard forms ("My good Hugh" [6], "Our poor friend" [17], "Our Person" [29, 33, 35, 38, 42 and *passim*]) to the ludicrous: "Our acrophobic Person" (19); "Our accommodating Person" (24); "Our *voyeur malgré lui*" (40), etc. The same strategy is used with a considerable vengeance in *Pnin,* where it is precisely the hero's double status as N-agent's "friend" ("my old friend" [191]) and as his own creation that is played with throughout the narrative (cf. 9, 15, 16, 19, 25, 35, 48, 53, 65, 80, 115, 142 and *passim*).[95]

In addition, we should notice *Bend Sinister,* where the fact of N-agent's literally "possessing" the hero (in the sense of having invented him) is laid bare through a fully explicit announcement:

> [108] The seedy tyrant or the president of the State, or the dictator, or whoever he was [. . .] did hand *my favorite character* a mysterious batch of neatly typed pages [. . .]
> (135; my emphasis)

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93. MENDILOW writes that any mention of "our hero" in a novel "constitute[s] an intrusion of the author into the story and switch[es] the reader back to his own present. The creaking of the machinery is heard; real men and women stiffen into wooden puppets jerked on visible strings by manipulator who, even if he remains unseen, is known and felt to be there" (1952, 102). He is correct, and the effect has been quite purposefully cultivated by VN in his fiction.

94. This evokes a standard intonation from *Evgenij Onegin.* E.g. Seven: X: "My poor Lenski!" (*EO* 1, 255).

95. In *Ada* the figure is used to ridicule itself out of existence, as Van Veen refers alternatively to: "Our hell-raker" (33); "Our six-footer" (67); "Our young botanist" (119); "Our distinguished lady novelist" (198); "Our acrobatic *voyeur*" (401); "Our wretched rake" (415); "Our old polemicist" (578); "Our time-racked, flat-flying couple" (587). "You like the authorial possessive, don't you, Van?" (212), as Ada queries at one point of the narrative.

"Lyrical" and "Professional" Digressions

In principle, any digression, any excursus incorporated into the narrative and not assignable to the viewpoint of C, carries the effect of calling attention to the personality of the teller. It is for this reason, I assume, that such passages have been traditionally labelled as *lyrical* in Slavic narratology. (Cf. EJKHENBAUM [1922, 29 *passim*] on the functions of *liricheskoe otstuplenie* in Tolstoj's prose. VN has himself commented on "lyrical explosions" in Pushkin [*EO* 2, 195] and Gogol' [*NG*, 77–84].)

This is another patently "monologic" device adopted by VN from the classical novel. As he further points out in his Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, digressions may either concern the private opinions and beliefs of N (in which case they are "autobiographizations" [*EO* 1, 19–20]), or they may be *professional* (*ibid*), concerning the narrative task at hand.

(i) *Lyrical.* In many instances a bare subclause or a parenthesis branching off from the main line of narration is sufficient to bring about the foregrounding effect. What we are witnessing here is the spectacle of N himself at work, digressing to make a point from behind the backs of his heroes (my emphases):

> [109] Actually [Leontiev] was a pessimist and, *like all pessimists, a ridiculously unobservant man.*
> (AffH; *RB*, 111)
>
> [110] 'Don't mention it, don't mention it', she replied and added many similar words – the poor relations of real words – *and how many there are of them, these little throw-away words that are spoken unhurriedly and temporarily fill the void.*
> (*Df*, 69)
>
> [111] [. . .] in one of his prophetic daydreams (*and any person with a lot of imagination has prophetic daydreams occasionally – such is the statistics of daydreams*), Martin [. . .] imagined himself in years to come [. . .]
> (*Gl*, 135)

More typically, however, such meditations are evolved at a greater length, until the unfolding of the action becomes wholly interrupted by reminders of N-agent's personal concerns behind the fiction.[96] Here is a sample of the topics treated by Nabokovian tellers at their more lyrical moments:

> [112] Beauty dwells in the light and stillness of laboratories [. . .][97]
> (*Gl*, 61–2; on "beauty" cf. also *LD*, 10)
>
> [113] [. . .] as we know, memory can restore to life everything except smells [. . .]
> (*M*, 60; on "memory" cf. *IB*, 181)
>
> [114] [. . .] the recurrent dream we all know [. . .]
> (*BS*, 55; on "dreams" cf. *Gl*, 114)
>
> [115] There is many a person whose soul has gone to sleep like a leg [. . .]
> (BM; *DS*, 169; cf. *KQKn*, 106)

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96. "Pamphleteering", this technique has been termed by critics bent on denouncing any stylistic figure that might weaken the sense of objectivity in a novel. For a well-known discussion of Tolstoj's work from this perspective cf. LUBBOCK 1921, 36, 26–42.

97. It is only predictable that many of VN's auctorial tellers share these concerns with their maker. The author himself writes in *Speak, Memory:* "In later years, I rediscovered the precise and silent beauty at the radiant bottom of a microscope's magic shaft" (166).

[116] There are great many people who, without possessing any expert knowledge, are able to readjust an electrical connection [. . .]
(*LD*, 149)

[117] [. . .] there is in every class [. . .] [a] quiet boy [. . .], just as there are invariably a fat boy, a strong boy and a wit [. . .]
(*Df*, 23)

Compare also the comical attack on "scientific linguistics" in *Pnin* (an overt parody of novelistic "pamphleteering"):

[118] [. . .] modern scientific linguistics, that ascetic fraternity of phonemes, that temple wherein earnest young people are taught not the language itself, but the method of teaching others to teach that method; which method, like a waterfall splashing from rock to rock, ceases to be a medium of rational navigation but perhaps in some fabulous future may become instrumental in evolving esoteric dialects – Basic Basque and so forth – spoken only by certain elaborate machines.[98]
(10)

Or the eulogy on "tap water" in *Transparent Things:*

[119] The tap expostulated, letting forth a strong squirt of rusty water before settling down to produce the meek normal stuff – which you do not appreciate sufficiently, which is a flowing mystery, and, yes, yes, which deserves monuments to be erected to it, cool shrines!
(5)

(ii) *Professional.* The sense of parodic foregrounding becomes even stronger when similar meditations are devoted to the problems of narrative-making itself. In these instances one of the recurrent topics in all Nabokovian writing is laid bare before the reader: the convention-bound nature of every literary device, and the concurrent task of the literary artist to restore their freshness.

There may be self-parodic comments on single phrases:

[120] The curtain was drawn for the public to re-pick themselves, as the French say.
(*KQKn*, 116)

[121] On the third hand (these mental states sprout additional forelimbs all the time) [. . .]
(*P*, 16)

On individual stylistic figures:

[122] His shiny pink face was clean-shaven like that of an actor (old-fashioned simile) [. . .]
(*BS*, 76)

[123] With an oath and a sigh Hugh retraced his steps, which was once a trim metaphor, and went back to the shop.
(*TT*, 14; cf. also 102–3)

Or on larger compositional devices:

[124] Despite his keen sense of humor, Dreyer was too naively self-centered to realize how thoroughly those sudden returns had been exploited in ribald tales.
(*KQKn*, 154; cf. 160)

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98. Cf. VN's comment on his own career as a language-teacher: "What bothered and angered me was the ineptitude of the system of Scientific Linguistics at Cornell" (*SO*, 294).

[125] [. . .] some days later [Paul] was put through on the telephone to Albinus, while the latter was still talking, and so overheard certain words (fate's classical method: eavesdropping) [. . .][99]
(*LD*, 47)

In *Bend Sinister,* the artifice underlying even the most authentic-looking segment of interior monologue becomes explicitly pointed out, as N intrudes into Krug's mental discourse with a reminder of its "quoted" status:

[126] My intelligence does not accept the transformation of physical discontinuity into the permanent continuity of a non-physical element escaping the obvious law, nor can it accept the insanity of accumulating incalculable treasures of thought and sensation, and thought-behind-thought and sensation-behind-sensation to lose them all at once and forever in a fit of black nausea followed by infinite nothingness. Unquote.
(87–8)

The Device of Flaunted Omniscience

Narratorial "omniscience" is, by definition, the precondition of all novels in which narration is not limited to a singular point of view. For once the boundaries of an individual consciousness have been transcended, there is nothing to prevent N from doing this again whenever the need arises. What information any auctorial N chooses to impart about his invented world is always the result of delibarate selection, even if the choices are seldom made explicit in the actual discourse.[100]

In VN's narratives, on the other hand, it is a recurrent strategy to capitalize on the standard situation by using a teller who overtly flaunts his cognitive superiority, or who by forgoing his selective function altogether parodically lays bare the privilege that he enjoys with regard to the hero. (Compare the comments by BAKHTIN on the inadmissibility of "the author's better-informed field of vision" [1963, 57] in the polyphonic novel – VN's narrative practice again provides a precise counterpoint to the Bakhtinian program.)

(i) *Overt "Flaunting".* The superior position of N becomes foregrounded, first, in those instances where it is expressly pointed out that given facts are inaccessible to anyone situated within the narrated reality.[101] This strategy functions in a somewhat muted

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99. This is another much-exploited source of parodies in VN's work. In "Translator's Foreword" to *A Hero of Our Time* (*HOT*, x–xii) the author takes care to tabulate each occurrence of the "eavesdropping device" in Lermontov's novel. Cf. also *SO*, 68 and *Lectures 3*, 143. In *Pale Fire* it is Kinbote who collates his own narrative posture with "[the] sheer luck [of] the eavesdropping *Hero of Our Time* or the omnipresent one of *Time Lost*" (87).

100. As CHATMAN succinctly formulates the problem: "Knowing All, of course, need not mean Telling All" (1978, 212). Would the latter be even possible within the limits of an actual narrative?

101. In fact, the inverse method – an arbitrary delimitation of N-agent's knowledge in portions of the narrative – may produce a somewhat similar effect. Compare *King, Queen, Knave:*

The flimsy paper [. . .] fluttered along the promenade, settled, fluttered again, and slithered past the happy couple; then it was wafted towards a bench in an embrasure of the balustrade, where an old man sitting in the sun meditatively pierced it with the point of his cane. What happened to it next is not known.
(259)

form e.g. in the following passage from *Mary*. A description of Ganin's walk through Berlin is interrupted by an observation that, it is indicated, neither he nor any of the other C-agents could have made on their own:

> [127] Occasionally, braying like a stag, a motorcar would dash by or *something would happen which no one walking in the city ever notices:* a star, faster than thought and with less sound than a tear would fall.
> (26; my emphasis)

In *The Defense,* after having stated that "nobody [. . .] had been able to dig down to what was most captivating about [Luzhin's fiancée]" (83), N proceeds to provide an in-depth analysis from his more privileged point of observation (83–4). Similarly in *Pnin* the initial description of the hero's appearance is followed by an insertion that underlines the total dependence of the passage on N-agent's own perspective:

> [128] Thus he might have appeared to a fellow passenger; *but except for a soldier asleep at one end and two women absorbed in a baby at the other, Pnin had the coach to himself.*
> (8; my emphasis)

The device occurs with a greater degree of flagrancy in *King, Queen, Knave:*

> [129] In a month or so [Franz] had grown completely accustomed to his work [. . .] He might have passed, indeed, for a perfectly ordinary salesman, were it not for a blend of details that only a detective of genius might have discerned [. . .] *But the only detective around was an elderly woman always with the same parcel, who did not bother patrolling Sports* [. . .]
> (79–80; my emphasis)

Still more flagrantly:

> [130] [. . .] neither Dreyer, nor Miss Reich (who had her own dreadful troubles), *nor anyone at all in the world* ever found out that the lonely and homesick inventor happened to live in the very same room where Franz had spent the night of his arrival [. . .] It is significant that Fate should have lodged him there of all places. It was a road that Franz had travelled – and at once Fate remembered and sent in pursuit this practically nameless man *who of course knew nothing of his important assignment, and never found out anything about it, as for that matter no one else ever did* [. . .]
> (*ibid,* 108; my emphasis)

And the most flagrantly of all:

> [131] Horror and helpless revulsion merged in [Franz's] nightmares with a certain non-terrestrial sensation, *known to those who have just died, or have suddenly gone insane after deciphering the meaning of everything.*
> (*ibid,* 202; emphasis as above)

(ii) *Overt Opposition of N and C.* In addition, the subordination of the hero to N may be foregrounded by having the latter overtly "correct" the hero's assessments of his world. This, too, is a staple strategy in Nabokovian narration. We find comments e.g. on non-Russian C-agent's unfamiliarity with the Cyrillic alphabet:

> [132] 'Bac berepom', read Kurt mistaking the Russian letters for Latin ones, which was excusable.
> (*Df,* 115; an identical instance occurs in MCh; *TD,* 155)

On C-agent's entomological ineptitude:

> [133] In the dark garden, everything was in bloom and smelled of candy, and there was a

continuous trilling of crickets, which [Lik] mistook (as all Russians do) for cicadas.
(Lik, *TD*, 79)

On his inept aesthetic judgments:

[134] [Ilya Borisovich] was fond of discussing Russian fiction: he esteemed Lugovoy (a regional mediocrity of the 1900's), appreciated Korolenko, and considered that Artsybashev debauched young readers.
(Lips; *RB*, 51)

Or on his naiveté in everyday life:

[135] All these immemorial and tender banalities[102] stirred Martin deeply.
(*Gl*, 82)

This type of foregrounding occurs with a particular frequency throughout *Laughter in the Dark*, where the hero's mental – and subsequently also physical – blindness becomes a major source of narrative ironies.

[136] 'Margot, Margot!' [Albinus] shouted, rattling the handle (and quite unconscious of the queer part doors played in his and her life).[103]
(132)

[137] 'Quite right', he replied with a polite smile. 'I remember you perfectly'. (He did not.)
(120)

[138] On his hand he felt something sticky (it was resin which had oozed out of the pine-wood of which the house was built).
(172)

Similarly, if quite redundantly, merely for the sake of flaunting the cognitively superior position of N:

[139] At supper he was so busy straining his ears for any suspicious rustle that he did not notice what he was eating (cold beef, in fact, with pickles).
(43)

It is the final, fitting irony in this comedy of errors that the novel concludes with still another example of the hero's obtuseness towards his surrounding reality. Groping

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102. Cf. an analogously explicit opposition of C-agent's inexpertise and N-agent's jaded vision from *King, Queen, Knave:*

[Franz] followed and forefelt her gestures, anticipated [ND] the banal but to him [CD] unique movement [. . .]
(82)

It is to be noted that when the two attributives are deleted – as in the Russian original, which reads only "*dvizhenie*" (*KQKn* R, 82) – the whole sense of narratorial control is abolished. This is one aspect of the general trend noticed by GRAYSON with regard to VN's method of translation and revision: "[a] development [. . .] towards increasing stylization, increasing deployment of artifice. The controlling hand of the author is more openly revealed, the reader is continually reminded that the action and the characters are but products of the artistic imagination" (1977, 4).

103. Compare further:

'Better lock the door', he thought. No, there was no key (doors were always against him).
(*LD*, 186)

Typically, these markers of foregrounded ND were added by the author to the revised English version. Cf. *LD* R, 140 and 202.

through his former home in search of Margot, blind Albinus attempts to visualize in his mind the once familiar apartment:

> [140] He could see the room distinctly – almost as if he had the use of his eyes; to the left, the striped sofa, against the right wall, a small table with the porcelain figure of a ballet-dancer [. . .]
> (185)

Even this, N proceeds to point out two pages later, proves erroneous. Compare the narratorial "stage directions" for the concluding scene in the novel:

> [141] [. . .] door – wide open. Table thrust away from it [. . .]. On the other (small) table, on which ages ago a porcelain ballet-dancer stood (later transferred to another room) lies a woman's glove [. . .]
> (187)

The Device of Unmotivated Perception

Narrative theorists have sometimes paid attention to the fact that many novelists tend to endow their texts with descriptions of natural landscape that by far surpass the perceptual capacities of the novelistic heroes. (PASCAL [1977, 105–12] comments on "narratorial usurpation" in Flaubert. Cf. also MCHALE 1978, 280; BRINTON 1980, 376; STANZEL 1982, 131–3.) While such instances are usually regarded as "errors" on the part of the novelist,[104] it needs to be pointed out that they may also be used as a specific narrative device in Nabokovian writing. The main effect of the device is again to make explicit the stylistic control of N, who may at any point take over.[105]

The latter is the case, most obviously, in those narratives where C-agent's perception is proven invalid through explicit references in the text. In *King, Queen, Knave* a mordantly satiric stance is adopted towards the vulgar and philistine tastes belonging to the principal heroes (e.g. the description of their joint response to "art" on 116–17). Nonetheless, the narrative is seen to bristle with accurate perceptions that clearly presuppose the trained sensibility of a literary artist. E.g. the following vision of nocturnal Berlin is incongruously transmitted through the eyes of obtuse Franz Bubendorf:

> [142] The lustre of the black asphalt was filmed by a blend of dim hues, through which here and there vivid rends and oval holes made by rain puddles revealed the authentic colors of deep reflections – a vermilion diagonal band, a cobalt wedge, a green spiral – scattered glimpses into a humid upside-down world, into a dizzy geometry of gems. The kaleidoscopic effect suggested someone's jiggling every now and then the pavement so as to

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104. MENDILOW refers unapprovingly to "description[s] of natural scenery given *ob extra* and not presented through the eyes of a character in a novel" (1952, 102). The critique rests again on the view that every element in novelistic discourse should aim towards an unbroken illusion of verisimilitude.

105. From VN's comments on Russian classics we learn that he himself considered vividly rendered descriptions of nature a precondition of all great fiction. Cf. e.g. his notes on Gogol's use of color in *Nikolai Gogol* (86–9) or the observation in *Lectures 2* that "Turgenev was the first Russian writer to notice the effect of broken sunlight or the special combination of shade and light upon the appearance of people" (69).

change the combination of numberless colored fragments. Meanwhile, shafts and ripples of life passed by, marking the course of every car. Shop windows, bursting with tense radiance, oozed, squirted and splashed into the rich blackness.
(74)

The entire paragraph-long *tableau* brings to the foreground a mind taking an obvious delight in its own power of ordering experience. The shifting shades of color, the optical illusions and suggestions of a latent harmony – these are all typically Nabokovian descriptive elements, each of them directing our attention away from the mentality of the hero and suggesting instead the presence of a separate "author" behind the constructed cityscape.[106]

A similar effect is in evidence in *Pnin,* where minute sketches of natural scenery are projected from the viewpoint of a hero whose indifference to his environment is among the chief concerns of the narrative ("Pnin [was] not a very observant man in everyday life" [148], etc.). Compare, for instance, the very precise distinctions of color in the following:

[143] When Pnin raised his eyes [. . .] it was dinnertime.

Doffing his spectacles, he rubbed with the knuckles of the hand that held them his naked and tired eyes and, still in thought, fixed his mild gaze on the window above, where, gradually, through his dissolving meditation, there appeared the violet-blue air of dusk, silver-tooled by the reflection of the fluorescent lights of the ceiling, and, among spidery black twigs, a mirrored row of bright book spines.[107]
(78)

The most extensive applications of this device are found in *Glory,* which presents us with still another case of a Nabokovian protagonist deprived of an artistic imagination. In prefacing the English edition of his novel VN in fact took specific care to point out that the stylistic patterning in the narrative is to be considered apart from the sensibility of the hero ("How easy it would have been to make him an artist, a writer; how hard not to make him be one [. . .]" [Foreword, xiii]). Consequently, the rich overlay of descriptive details and *tableau*-like constructions in the novel is effective in pitting N-agent's vision directly against that of his hero. Compare e.g. the recurring jewel imagery with its attendant emphasis on light and color:

[144] Presently Martin stood up, stretched his legs, ascended a dark turfy slope, and walked to the edge of the precipice. [. . .] To the left, in the murky mysterious distance, shimmered the diamond lights of Yalta. [. . .] The crickets kept crepitating; from time to time there came a sweet whiff of burning juniper; and above the black alpestrine steppe, above the silken sea, the enormous, all-engulfing sky, dove-gray with stars, made one's head spin [. . .]
(20)

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106. In his review of the Russian original CETLIN quite rightfully observed that *"this is Berlin seen through Russian eyes, by a writer familiar with Dostoevskij's and Bunin's Petersburg" (1928, 537).

107. Similarly "unmotivated" perceptions also occur on 73, 79, 110. One may again be reminded of the author's remarks on his Russian precursors in *Nikolai Gogol:* "Before [Gogol's] and Pushkin's advent Russian literature was purblind. What form it perceived was an outline directed by reason: it did not see color for itself [. . .]. It was Gogol (and after him Lermontov and Tolstoy) who first saw yellow and violet at all" (86).

[145] It was then that he suddenly saw [. . .] a handful of lights in the distance, in a fold of darkness between two black hills: the lights would hide and reappear, and then they came twinkling from a completely different direction, and abruptly vanished, as if somebody had covered them with a black kerchief.
(21)

[146] At that moment, in response to his recollections, Martin saw through the window what he had seen as a child – a necklace of lights, far away, among dark hills. Someone seemed to pour them from one hand into the other, and pocket them.[108]
(157)

Or the following description, featuring Martin's observations of the Russian countryside from the window of a speeding train. Even a covert reference to N-agent's act of "writing" down the actual scene is smuggled in under the guise of a striking metaphor:

[147] White fields stretched outside; here and there leafless sallows struck out of the snow. By a crossing gate stood a woman in felt boots, holding a green flag; a peasant, who had jumped down from his sledge, shielded with his mittens the eyes of his backing nag. And at night he saw something wonderful: past the black mirrory window flew thousands of sparks – arrowlike flourishes of a fire-tipped pen.
(24)

2.2.3. Foregrounding of ND as a Structural Principle: Self-Reference in *Bend Sinister*

2.2.3.1. Two Micro-Models

There are numerous works by VN in which the relationship between the auctorial teller and the hero is made to bear directly on the thematic import of the narrative. Before we take up in detail the question of narrative patterning in *Bend Sinister* – surely the most consistently self-referential and parodistic of all Nabokovian novels – let us look at two of the author's shorter and less familiar texts. It will be suggested that these stories provide compact models, as it were, of the larger novelistic system that we are now about to examine.

"A Forgotten Poet"

In our previous discussion of VN's *illusion device* (2.1.2.4.) we discovered that the author often upends the reader's conception of a standard "reality" by subsuming large segments of NW in his narratives into the private consciousness of C. A related effect may also be produced through manipulations of N-agent's discourse. It is another much-used strategy in the author's work to insert segments of foregrounded ND into even quite objective-seeming reports, gradually accumulating the markers of narratorial control, until in the end the entire plane of the narrated reality is revealed to be a pure fiction, the maker of

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108. Compare also the description of Franz's first arrival to Berlin in *King, Queen, Knave:*

Another hour passed and in the murky gloom there appeared distant clusters of light, diamond-like conflagrations. [. . .] A minor station flew past, just a platform, a half-opened jewel box, and all grew dark again as if no Berlin existed within miles. At last a topaz light spread out over a thousand tracks and rows of wet railway cars [. . .].
(18)

Such passages would seem to be more intimately connected with the author's, rather than his heroes', recollections. Cf. *Speak, Memory* (36) for a precise duplication of these images.

which himself assumes the role of a principal protagonist in the system of the text. This is the device that we find operative in "A Forgotten Poet" (*ND,* 29–41).

The story, seemingly no more than an anecdote, concerns a certain "regrettable incident" (37) taking place at a literary meeting in pre-revolution St. Petersburg. Organized to commemorate an obscure nineteenth-century poet – "Konstantin Perov" (29) – the meeting is disrupted by an old man who claims to be the authentic Perov and demands for his personal use the sum collected for the poet's monument (31–7). Although this claim is never verified, the organizing committee deems it wiser to stifle a brewing scandal by somehow compensating the self-acclaimed poet. When a Perov home museum is later founded the old man is hired as its janitor, and the story concludes by tracing the fate of this institution well into the Soviet era (37–41).

Caution is required in reading this small tale, however, for what is easily overlooked by the reader is the series of implanted references to N-agent's own role behind the unfolding history. The first of these occurs immediately in the second paragraph, as N cuts short his narration in order to offer a personal appraisal of Perov's *oeuvre:*

> [148] Most readers like best those poems of his where the ideals of emancipation, so characteristic of the Russian fifties, are expressed in a glorious storm of obscure eloquence [. . .]. Personally, I prefer the purer and at the same time bumpier lyrics such as 'The Gypsy' or 'The Bat'.
> (29)

Similar, deceptively innocuous references to the teller's function keep cropping up with increasing frequency in the course of the telling. There is e.g. various mention of documents and witnesses' accounts that N has purportedly consulted prior to the writing:

> [149] A friend of mine, almost twice my age and now the only surviving witness of the event, tells me [. . .]
> (31; cf. also 32–3, 35, 37, 38)

Further on, N even takes up his "truthfulness", pointing out that what the documents do not tell is also excluded from his narrative:

> [150] It is rumored that at a certain secret session of the Society for the Advancement of Russian Literature the numerous insulting epistles that the old man kept sending in were carefully compared by experts with a very old letter written by the poet [. . .]. [N]one except the scholars who pored over its faded ink knew of its existence. Neither do we know what their findings were.
> (39)

It is not until the final paragraph that the actual *clou* of the construction is revealed, as N starts discoursing on the posthumous fame of his hero:

> [151] But no matter. Somehow or other, in the next twenty years or so, Russia lost all contact with Perov's poetry. Young Soviet citizens know as little about his works *as they do about mine.*
> (41; my emphasis)

He goes on to assert that a time will probably come when the forgotten poet is remembered again. Nonetheless –

> [152] *one cannot help feeling that, as things stand, people are missing a great deal.* One wonders also what future historians will make of the old man and his extraordinary contention. But that, of course, is a matter of secondary importance.
> (*ibid;* emphasis as above)

What is of primary importance, it is suggested in this way, is the situation of N himself as it is reflected in the narration. By weaving his yarn of the apocryphal Perov the Nabokovian teller has also managed to compose a parable of his own role as a literary artist. Rather than the anonymous recorder that he mimics at the outset, he too turns out to be "a forgotten poet", whose art awaits its discovery by the reader.[109] And by bringing his narrative to its completion he has demonstrated that readers are indeed "missing a great deal" until they give due regard to the inventive skill that has brought into being the present, outwardly most authentic-looking history.[110]

"Recruiting"

In "Recruiting" (*TD,* 103–10) the gradual emergence of N is actualized through an even more deceptive application of the strategy. This is another story presented as a straightforward retelling of the hero's life. The essential intrigue is telescoped in the first clauses of the story:

> [153] He was old, he was ill, and nobody in the world needed him. In the matter of poverty Vasiliy Ivanovich had reached the point where a man no longer asks himself on what he will live tomorrow, but merely what he had lived on the day before. In the way of private attachments, nothing on this earth meant much to him apart from his illness. His elder, unmarried sister, with whom he had migrated from Russia to Berlin in the 1920's, had died ten years ago. He no longer missed her, having got used instead to a void shaped in her image.
> (103)

From here on, the motifs of exile, alienation, and illness are developed almost to the point of banality. The narrative incorporates various meditations by the hero on the fate of the Russian intelligentsia in emigration, on his own loneliness, or on his oncoming death (cf. the first half of the story, 103–7). In this way a central "theme", not unfamiliar from the author's other writing, appears to be taking shape: that of material privations and personal isolation ennobled by a rich spiritual life.[111] As N summarizes:

> [154] [. . .] tired, lonely, fat, ashamed, with all the nuances of old-fashioned modesty, of his mended linen, his decaying trousers, his whole unkempt, unloved, shabbily furnished corpulence, [Vasiliy Ivanovich] nevertheless found himself filled with an almost indecent

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109. We know, of course, that this was the situation of VN himself in the early 1940's when "A Forgotten Poet" was written. But that is another matter.

110. The essential suggestion – that the "authentic" history is always secondary to the art of telling – is also put forward in the form of the following simile, teasingly broken off just when N is about to call his bluff:

> Then one morning [Perov] was found dead on his bench [. . .]. And as if some great hand with a great rasping sound had torn out a great bunch of pages from a number of books, *or as if some frivolous story writer had bottled an imp of fiction in the vessel of truth,* or as if . . .
> (40; my emphasis)

Has "Perov" ever existed as an autonomous character even within the fictive reality of the story? I doubt it, and therefore "The Forgotten Poet" was classified as a variation of N_E-text in our foregoing catalogue (*Table 1* [1.2.5.]).

111. This concern is apparent in a number of VN's Russian stories dating from the same period. Cf. e.g. "Perfection", "Lik", or "The Reunion". The author has expounded at some length on the same subject in Chapter Fourteen of *Speak, Memory,* 280–8 *passim.*

kind of joy of unknown origin, which, more than once in the course of his long and rather arduous life, had surprised him by its sudden onset.
(107)

Again, it is only after the reader has been thoroughly coaxed into accepting the created illusion of verisimilitude that N proceeds to bring it down. The existence of "Vasiliy Ivanovich" as an authentic person is shown to be a pure figment, constructed on the basis of an unknown German with whom N is himself sharing a bench in a Berlin park.[112] This occurs when N overtly shifts the reference to his own person in the second half of the story:

[155] A man with the local Russian newspaper sat down on the same dark-blue, sun-warmed, hospitable, indifferent bench. It is difficult for me to describe this man; then again, it would be useless, since a self-portrait is seldom successful [. . .]
(107–8)

It is due to this revelation that certain previous references to the hero as N-agent's "recruit" receive a belated motivation. For instance:

[156] In the impersonal Berlin crush of the tram, there was another old refugee [besides Vasiliy Ivanovich] staying around ,to the very last, a non-practicing lawyer, who was also returning from the cemetery and was also of little use to anyone *except me.*
(104; my emphasis)

[157] Finally (and *that* was the very moment I caught, *after which I never left the recruit out of my sight*), [Vasiliy Ivanovich] got off and, since he was heavy and clumsy, the conductor helped him [. . .]
(*ibid;* the first emphasis is in the text, the second is mine)

After the mention of the "man with the [. . .] Russian newspaper" in ex. [155] the focus is shifted entirely from occurrences taking place on the plane of NW to N-agent's own motives for creating the narrative. He asserts that, while he could never verify whether the stranger sitting beside him was even Russian (109), he had still wished to give him the traits of a "typical" émigré character (cf. 108–9). The image of the hero's deceased sister was modelled on "a distant relative" of N himself (108). Other details for Vasiliy Ivanovich's past were culled from the newspaper that N happened to be holding at the moment of his literary inspiration (*ibid*). And in the end the whole series of narrated facts is dismissed as a preliminary draft for "an episode in a novel" (109) that is presently in the process of being composed.

Even the "indecent kind of joy of unknown origin" (above ex. [154]) in Vasiliy Ivanovich's mind is redefined as an outcome of the teller's own creative excitement – a sensation, it is argued, that may be resolved only through the imagination of an artist controlling his fictive world. This is the notion that we shall find underlying also the gamut of self-referential devices applied throughout *Bend Sinister:*

[158] By an odd combination of emotions I felt I was infecting that stranger with the blazing creative happiness that sends a chill over an artist's skin. I wished that, despite his age, his indigence, the tumor in his stomach, [Vasiliy Ivanovich] might share the terrible

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112. We remember that a similar device was used in *The Gift* (320–5) in reporting the imaginary colloquy between Fyodor and the unknown German. Also in the early poem "*Prokhozhij s elkoj*" (1925) VN depicts his speaker sketching a portrait of a chance passer-by, observed treading *"the snows of foreign squares/with a German Christmas tree [*v snegakh ne nashikh ploshchadej/s nemeckoj elochkoj svoej*]" (*Stikhi* 1979, 178).

> power of my bliss, redeeming its unlawfulness with his complicity, so that it would cease being a unique sensation, a most rare variety of madness, a monstrous sunbow spanning my whole inner being, and be accessible to two people at least, becoming their topic of conversation and thus acquiring rights to routine existence, of which my wild, savage, stifling happiness is otherwise deprived.[113]
> (109)

2.2.3.2. The SR_1+SR_2 Pattern

The Pattern

The narrative in *Bend Sinister* is based on essentially two types of self-reference. Preliminarily, these may be described as follows:

(i) *SR_1*. With this abbreviation we may indicate any intrusion by a conventionally auctorial type of N: omniscient commentary, digressions on topics not available to C-agents, inserted theorizings on the making of the narrative, or other utterances laying bare the presence of a separate "author" behind the constructed fiction. The range of devices involved in this variety of novelistic play was detailed in the above survey.

(ii) *SR_2*. The second variety encompasses any reference to N as an individuated "character" (though still not one existing on the same plane with his C-agents). In these instances N is no longer presented as an anonymous presence somewhere above the whole, but rather as occupying *a definite place* within the novelistic universe: as a figure whose own relationship with the constructed fiction becomes a part of the central problematics in the novel. This particular device was exemplified with the two stories above.

By characterizing *Bend Sinister* in terms of an alternation between (i) and (ii), we have in mind a pattern that clearly deviates from the rules observed in most novels. While both types of SR are common enough in themselves, it is not normal for them to co-occur within a single text. We are accustomed to dealing either with a wholly omniscient and manipulative N (say, in Tolstoj's *War and Peace*), or with N as a pure-bred "character", in which case various limitations are placed on his ability to manipulate the narrative. *Bend Sinister,* on the other hand, presents us with the case of a narrative starting as an auctorial construction, but *evolving by degrees towards an ever greater individuation of the teller.* In the end – as also in "Recruiting" or "A Forgotten Poet" – it is the figure of N who alone remains in the foreground, discoursing overtly on the new plane of "reality" that has emerged from behind the illusory level of fiction.[114]

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113. Notice that a further differentiation takes place in the concluding paragraph, as N suggests that from his present viewpoint the past inspiration on the park bench is no more than another "fiction":

> My representative, the man with the Russian newspaper, was now alone on the bench and, as he had moved over into the shade where [Vasiliy Ivanovich] had just been sitting, the same cool linden pattern that had anointed his predecessor now rippled across his forehead. (110).

114. I refer here only briefly to another variation of the pattern in *Pnin,* where the omniscient teller paradoxically inhabits *the same* plane of reality with his hero (i.e. he is still a N_1-agent; cf. *Table 1* [1.2.5.]). In the concluding chapter of the novel the teller closely misses coming face to face with the protagonist of his own tale (*P,* 186–91). From *Letters* (cf. 183) we learn that VN's initial plan was to have the hero confront his maker also in the conclusion of *Bend Sinister,* but the possibility is only half-realized in the final version.

The significance of the pattern becomes evident if we look at those readings of *Bend Sinister* in which it has been ignored. In these instances the novel is read primarily as a political satire. Its main thematic thrust is seen to concern a confrontation between the hero, a philosopher called Adam Krug, and the totalitarian ideology of "Ekwilism", for which it is only too easy to find real-life models from VN's own personal history.[115] While proponents of this reading normally concede that the novel has its pithier moments, it is still pronounced unconvincing as a satiric work. The author's invented country is deemed overly fantastic to be taken seriously, and the actual narrative is found flawed by a playfulness that is inappropriate to the political content. The complaint was lucidly put already by Edmund Wilson, who wrote to the author in 1947 that in comparison with "the hideous contemporary reality [. . .] the adventures of [the] unfortunate professor have an air of an unpleasant burlesque". He went on to add that the overall result is "something that *does not seem real*".[116]

If we, by contrast, adopt another course, taking due notice of the self-referential techniques in the narrative while still lumping them together, we arrive at a reading in which both (i) and (ii) are attributed to an abstract "author" with no further qualification. What results, is a view of the novel as a parodistic, dazzlingly technical affair that nonetheless appears somewhat facile: a virtuoso show of the author's own cleverness that no deeper import holds together.[117]

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115. VN has himself given only guarded credence to the biographic reading. In his Introduction to the novel he ascertains that the writing of *Bend Sinister* was affected by "the idiotic and despicable regimes that [. . .] have brushed against [him] in the course of [his] life: worlds of tyranny and torture, of Fascists and Bolshevists, of Philistine thinkers and jackbooted baboons" (ix). But he goes on to add that "*Bend Sinister* is not really about life and death in a grotesque police state" (*ibid*).

116. Quoted from *Letters,* 183; my emphasis. Such readings were common in early reviews of the novel, written long before the parodistic qualities of VN's art had gained a larger currency. *Bend Sinister* was the author's second novel to be published originally in English. It was reviewed in 1947 by WATTS, BORLAND, ROTHMAN, and D. TRILLING, who all tended to downplay the text's narrative intricacies ("elaborate chicanery" according to Diana Trilling [1947, 722]). For more recent treatments of the politico-satiric side of the novel cf. LEE 1967 and 1976, 104–14; HYMAN 1970; HYDE 1977, 140–4; RAMPTON 1984, 45–63; LONG 1984, 11–15.

117. This is the second main line of *Bend Sinister* criticism, and it includes some explications that are thorough indeed. The first discussion of the narrative technique in the novel was provided by KERMODE (1960), who also suggested some rather apt parallels with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (esp. 83–5). For other treatments cf. STEGNER 1966, 76–89; FIELD 1967, 198–203; BADER 1972, 95–122; LOKRANTZ 1973, 14–21; FOWLER 1974, 30–6; GRABES 1977, 18–30. Many of these discussions are marred by the unproblematic equation of the auctorial N with "Nabokov" himself – although few critics have put the notion as explicitly as MOYNAHAN, who maintains that the conclusion of the novel displays the real author "*in propria persona*" (1971, 24). By far the best analyses of the novel are, to my mind, those in which the said assumption is avoided. See esp. FROMBERG-SCHAEFFER (1973) – who expressly warns against identifying "the intrusive author" of the embedded discourse with "the 'real' author" (118) – and PATTESON (1977), who draws attention to "the narrator's [. . .] presence in the novel as both 'author' and 'character' " (1977, 242). Certain overlappings between these two essays and the present chapter cannot be avoided. The most recent discussions of *Bend Sinister,* none of them directly devoted to narrative problematics, include PIFER 1980, 68–96; JOHNSON 1981b, 547–53; MADDOX 1983, 50–65.

Neither of these approaches serves to explain the status given to N in the total design of the text. The author himself drew pertinent attention to this problem when he asserted, in a letter written while *Bend Sinister* was still in progress, that –

> [159] towards the end of the book [. . .] there will be the looming and development of an idea which has *never* been treated before.
> (*Letters* [January 18, 1944], 126; emphasis in the text)

The same notion was taken up again by VN in his introductory remarks to the novel, where he refers to the appearances of what he calls "an anthropomorphic deity" in the background of the tale (*BS,* xiv). Towards the end, he asserts here, this deity will experience "a bang of pity for [the hero]", wholly taking over the unfolding of the narrative (*ibid*). Consequently, Krug himself will understand that "he is in good hands", and his death on the concluding page of the novel will be shown to be "but a question of style" (*ibid*).

The curiously *theological* undertone of such cogitations (i.e. the reference to a "deity") should not be taken altogether lightly, for in fact the author's self-assessment bears quite closely on the narrative ordering of the text. What *Bend Sinister* plays upon is precisely the time-honored notion of the literary artist as omnipotent "God" with regard to his created fiction. One need only think here of the famous Flaubertian ideal of objective and impersonal narration:

> An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful; he should be everywhere felt but nowhere seen.
> (quoted from ELLMANN-FEIDELSON 1965, 132)

A parodic rebuttal of this precept[118] will be seen to motivate the first group of SR-markers (1) as they keep reoccurring in the narrative. At the same time, the novel goes far beyond the initial formula, suggesting that the control gained by any artist is only a comparative matter, *extending no further than the world inside the fiction.* I would suspect that it was mainly the latter notion that was in the author's mind when he wrote his commentary (in ex. [159]), and it is the function of the second SR-type (2) – overlooked by many former critics – to guarantee this effect in the novel.

The concrete forms assumed by the pattern are detailed below.

SR_1: Overt Play

In his study of *Tristram Shandy* SHKLOVSKIJ wrote that, for Sterne, it is "[the] awareness of the form through its violation that constitutes the content of the novel" (1921b, 30–1). The same might well be said of *Bend Sinister,* as it is here that the author has put on display the entire repertory of his foregrounding techniques, playing not only on particular literary devices, but also on the overall status of the novelistic

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118. It was of course duplicated by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man* (JOYCE 1916, 214–15), and subsequently adopted by a major portion of twentieth-century novelists. VN, for his part, is here setting all his weight against the "objective" tradition.

reality as "fiction".[119] The most salient moments in this compositional game include the following.

(i) We have already seen N in *Bend Sinister* indulging in an overt commentary on given stylistic figurations ("[. . .] old-fashioned simile" [76]; above ex. [122]) or on larger compositional strategies (exs. [108], [126]). Similarly, in introducing the colloquy between Krug and Ember on the thematics of *Hamlet* in Chapter Seven, N takes up the separate "themes" manipulated in his own discourse. The self-parodic digression turns out to bear also on the general method of motif-recurrence employed throughout the narrative in *Bend Sinister*:[120]

> [160] There are two themes here: the Shakesperian one rendered in the present tense, with Ember presiding in his ruelle; and another theme altogether, a complex mixture of past, present, and future, with Olga's absence causing dreadful embarrassment.
> (94)

In other instances N may simulate getting "tired" with the act of narration itself, leaving the discourse half-finished (or cutting it short altogether, as happens in the conclusion):

> [161] 'Eez eet zee verity', said Beuret, suddenly shifting to English, which he knew Krug understood, and speaking it like a Frenchman in an English book, 'eez eet zee verity zat, as I have been informed by zee reliable sources, zee disposed *chef* of the state has been captured with a couple of other blokes (when the author gets tired of the process – or forgets) somewhere in the hills – and shot? But no, I ziss cannot credit – eet eez too orrible' (when the author remembers again).[121]

(ii) There occur also addresses to hypothetical readers, supposedly pondering the propriety of a given scene – e.g. in connection with Krug's "Freudian" dream in Chapter Five:

> [162] Krug [. . .] found himself running (by night, ugly? Yah, by night, folks) down something that looked like a railway track through a long damp tunnel [. . .]
> (58; readers are further evoked on 93 and 127)

Or narratorial self-addresses implanted within a rapidly evolving episode:

> [163] Describe the bedroom. Allude to Ember's bright brown eyes. [. . .] Ember gratefully adopts the subject selected. He [. . .] prefers to talk shop. Last chance of describing the bedroom.
> (94–5)

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119. E.g. in the paradoxical assertion that "had [Krug] been a character in fiction, he might well have wondered whether the strange doings [. . .] had not been some evil vision [. . .]" (188). C-agents may even themselves be allowed to discourse on their own fictionality. Compare the retort by one of the Ekwilist henchmen:

> I did not delegate anybody. You are in the presence of an underpaid *chinovnik*. As a matter of fact, I deplore everything that has happened in Russian literature.
> (190)

120. Cf. VN's own comment on "the wayside murmur of this or that hidden theme" in his Introduction (*BS*, xiv).

121. Under the guise of frivolous tomfoolery VN has again managed to smuggle in an entirely valid observation on novelistic conventions. Cf. the discussion by USPENSKY (1970, 45–50) on the transmission of foreign phrases in *War and Peace*, where it is shown that on occasion Tolstoj indeed "forgets" the difference between pure speech-records and indirect narratorial discourse. The same phenomenon has been parodied by VN in "Lik" (*TD*, 72–3).

(iii) N may overtly toy with variant ways of rendering a given episode, pointing out that in principle there is an infinite number of variants: "No, it did not go on quite like that [. . .]" (131); "Thus? Or perhaps in some other way" (135). He may provide "a dehydrated and condensed" (95) version of a confrontation between two C-agents, or he may whimsically decide to have one of the participants "made up" for a scene that has already been once recounted:

> [164] In a word, he was a little too repulsive to be credible, and so let us ring the bronze bell [. . .] and have him beautified by a mortician.
> (128)

(iv) In addition, N may playfully distort the chronological order of the episodes, denoting an excerpt as "Unnumbered scene (belonging to one of the last acts, anyway)" (192; a most Sternean strategy, cf. SHKLOVSKIJ 1921b, 28). In such instances the narrative takes the form of an unfinished manuscript, or perhaps that of assembled stage-directions for a cinematic version:[122]

> [165] It is not a difficult part but still the actor must be careful not to overdo what Graaf somewhere calls 'villainous deliberation'.
> (132)

> [166] The actor playing the recipient should be taught not to look at his hand while he takes the papers *very slowly* (keeping the lateral lower-jaw muscles in movement, please) but to stare straight at the giver: in short, look at the giver first, then lower your eyes to the gift.
> (135; emphasis in the text)

(v) At their most explicit such suggestions of narratorial control are in those instances where N is allowed to concretely intrude into the narrated action – either observing his creations under the guise of a "secret spectator":

> [167] Photographed from above,[123] [Krug and Paduk] would have come out in Chinese perspective, doll-like, a little limp but possibly with a hard wooden core under their plausible clothes [. . .] and the secret spectator (some anthropomorphic deity, for example) surely would be amused by the shape of human heads seen from above.
> (131)

Or actually crossing over to the plane inhabited by his C-agents, in which case specific markers are left of his visitation. Compare e.g. the voluminous digression on the "producers" behind Krug's dream of his former school days:

> [168] But is it really as crude as all that? Who is behind the timid producers? No doubt, this desk at which Krug finds himself sitting has been hastily borrowed from a different set [. . .]. No doubt, too, there is something wrong about the position of the door [. . .]. But among the producers or stagehands responsible for the setting there has been one . . . it is hard to express it . . . a nameless, mysterious genius who took advantage of the dream to convey his own peculiar code message which has nothing to do with school days or indeed with any aspect of Krug's physical existence, but which links him up somehow with an unfathomable mode of being, perhaps terrible, perhaps blissful, perhaps neither, a kind of

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122. This is once more a typically Nabokovian method of foregrounding. Cf. the "Stage directions for the last silent scene" in *Laughter in the Dark* (187) or the opening paragraph of Chapter Six in *King, Queen, Knave* (110–11). For other comments on "film imagery" in *Bend Sinister* cf. the paper by BIENSTOCK 1982.

123. Elsewhere, Krug is viewed by N "from the side" (173), and Paduk is depicted standing "with his hands behind his back and his back to the reader" (127).

transcendental madness which lurks behind the corner of consciousness and which cannot be defined more accurately than this, no matter how Krug strains his brain.
(55–6)

Related occurrences include the assertion that "someone [is] in the know" (56) further on in the dream-digression; the reference to "[a] mind behind the mirror" (209) near the close of the novel; or the recurring mention of "the enchanter" and his "conjuror's set (70) at various points in the narrative.[124]

(vi) The final visitation takes place just before the conclusion, as even the last vestige of verisimilitude is dismissed by N who now assumes overt control over the unfolding action:

> [169] It was at that moment, just after Krug had fallen through the bottom of a confused dream and sat up on the straw with a gasp – and just before his reality, his remembered hideous misfortune could pounce upon him – it was then that I felt a pang of pity for Adam and slid towards him along an inclined beam of pale light – causing instantaneous madness, but at least saving him from the sense of agony of his logical fate.
> (210)

It is as a thoroughly motivated extension of all these narrative ploys, then, that in the concluding paragraphs of *Bend Sinister* the reference is entirely shifted from Krug's reality to the extrinsic plane on which the history has been generated. At the very high-point of the action, as the insane hero charges against his Ekwilist oppressors, the scene is abruptly cut short by N. Instead of the awaited "culmination" of Krug's history (i.e. his death) we are treated to a definite anticlimax, which nonetheless evolves into a flagrant demonstration of the artist's dominion over his constructed artifact:

> [170] In a burst of vigorous speed, Krug was running towards the wall, where Paduk, his features dissolving in the water of fear, had slipped from his chair and was trying to vanish. The yard seethed in wild commotion. Krug dodged the embrace of a guard. Then the left side of his head seemed to burst into flames (that first bullet took off part of his ear), but he stumbled on cheerfully [. . .]. He saw the Toad crouching at the foot of the wall, shaking, dissolving, speeding up his shrill incantations, protecting his dimming face with his transparent arm, and Krug ran towards him, and just a fraction of an instant before another and better bullet hit him, he shouted again: You, you – and the wall vanished, like a rapidly withdrawn slide, and I stretched myself and got up from among the chaos of written and rewritten pages [. . .].[125]
> (216)

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124. E.g. "the magician in our midst" on 31. In Nabokovian writing the literary artist is often paralleled to a "conjuror". Cf. "An Evening of Russian Poetry": "The conjuror collects his poor belongings –/the colored handkerchief, the magic rope,/the double-bottomed rhymes, the cage, the song" (*PP,* 162). So also in *Pale Fire* (27–8), or in the finale to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:* "[. . .] and the old conjurer waits in the wings with his hidden rabbit" (192).

125. In view of the previous affinities noted between Pushkin's and VN's intrusive methods, one may be tempted to discern an intertextual connection between ex. [170] and the famous conclusion to Chapter Three of *Evgenij Onegin.* Here Tat'jana's confrontation with Onegin is quite similarly delayed through a flagrant narratorial interpolation. In VN's own translation:

> But the effects of the unlooked-for meeting
> today dear friends,
> I have not the strength to detail;
> after this long discourse I need
> a little jaunt, a little rest;
> some other time I'll tell the rest.
> (*EO* 1, 173)

After ex. [170] above, N refrains from any further mention of the hero's fate, devoting the remaining paragraphs to a sketch of his own real-life surroundings. The reader is treated to an account of objects lying scattered about N-agent's writing desk, a glimpse out of his study window, and the narrative closes with a few professional meditations on his goals as a writer (216–17).

In this manner, the status of foregrounded ND in the novel comes to be seen in a new light by the reader. As it will appear, the ultimate switch has been anticipated by a variety of more covert references tying together the alternative realities of Krug and his maker. The following instances are quite distinctive to *Bend Sinister* and can no longer be traced back to traditionally "Sternean" techniques of novelistic intrusion.

(i) *Writing-Desk Motifs.* There are certain mysterious instants in the narrative when N-agent's literary labors appear to be duplicated by motifs belonging solely to the hero's reality. Krug himself, it is suggested, may on occasion have paradoxical premonitions of the actual manuscript ("the [. . .] written and rewritten pages" in ex. [170]) on which his life is at the same time being recorded. Lying half-awake in the Ekwilist cell after his arrest, Krug registers:

> [171] [. . .] the usual nocturnal sounds peculiar to great prisons: the occasional akh-kha kha-akha yawn of a guard, [. . .] the pattering sound made by the excrementa of bats, the cautious crackling of the page which had been viciously crumpled and thrown into the wastebasket and was making a pitiful effort to uncrumple itself and live just a little longer.
> (210)

Similarly, during the confrontation between Krug and Paduk in Chapter Eleven, the latter is shown fiddling with objects scattered about *his* writing desk. The somewhat absurdly precise reference is again motivated from N-agent's – rather than the hero's – viewpoint, for it is suggested that an identical implement may have been employed in setting down this scene on paper:

> [172] Paduk leaned back in his chair and tapped his nose with the rubber end of his six-faceted pencil. As his thoughts took a different course, he changed the position of the pencil: he now held it by the end, horizontally, rolling it slightly between the finger and thumb of either hand, seemingly interested in the disappearance and reappearance of Eberhard Faber No 2 3/8.
> (132)

Compare in this respect also the description of the evening sky, transmitted through Krug's eyes in the opening episode:

> [173] It is all inky black with a pale blue inky sky – 'runs blue, writes black' as that ink bottle said, but it did not, nor does the sky, but the trees do [. . .]
> (3)

Or the peculiar insertion of the "overworked eye" even into Krug's most private fantasies of an escape. (One may well be reminded here of VN's previously-cited adage on the "eye of the great writer always noting what his puppets are up to"; ex. [104].)

> [174] [Krug] visualized a railway platform and glanced at a playing card and bits of orange peel enlivening the coal dust between the rails under a Pullman car which was still waiting for him in a blend of summer and smoke but a minute later would be gliding out of the station, away, away, into the fair mist of the incredible Carolinas. And following it along the darkling swamps, and hanging faithfully in the evening aether, and slipping through the

telegraph wires, as chaste as a wove-paper watermark, as smoothly moving as the transparent tangle of cells that floats athwart an overworked eye, the lemon-pale double of the lamp that shone above the passenger would mysteriously travel across the turquoise landscape in the window.[126]
(165–6)

(ii) *Entomology.* Another series of correlations in the narrative suggests that N is not only a writer, but also a practicing lepidopterist.[127] What initially causes him to interrupt his writing is the sound of a moth pattering against the wire netting of his study window. The description given of the insect is entomologically exact:

[175] As I had thought, a big moth was clinging with furry feet to the netting, on the night's side; its marbled wings kept vibrating, its eyes glowed like two miniature coals. I had just time to make out its streamlined brownish-pink body and a twinned spot of color; and then it let go and swung back into the warm damp darkness.
(217)

In the final clauses it is indicated that N will in fact resume his "mothing" (*ibid*) once the more immediate writing-chores are finished.

Traces of these activities again pervade Krug's plane of reality – e.g. under the guise of an ancient "insect book" inside which he finds a picture of "an ocellated hawk moth [. . .] cl[i]ng[ing] to a twig [. . .]" (161). Also the insect clinging to N-agent's window was a "hawk moth". The interpenetration of one narrative plane into another becomes complete, when Krug in another episode mentally addresses his deceased wife. Compare this with ex. [175] above, describing occurrences that should be fully outside the hero's purview:

[176] I think I shall have you [. . .] carrying that hawk moth back into the orchard [. . .]. Very slowly, rosewise, you opened your hands. There, clinging with all its six fluffy feet to the ball of your thumb, the tip of its mouse-gray body slightly excurved, its short, red, blue-ocellated interior wings oddly protruding forward from beneath the sloping superior ones which were long and marbled and deeply notched –
(120)

(iii) *Puddle-Shapes.* Once alerted from his writing to the external world, N goes on to survey the actual landscape outside his window:

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126. The occurrences of "wove-paper watermark" and "lemon-pale lamp" (reminiscent of its double in N-agent's study [217]) serve as additional reminders of the interplay between "reality" and fiction.

127. This can be deduced from markers included in the text. Outside the text we know, of course, that the author was himself employed as a researcher in the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology while working on the manuscript of *Bend Sinister* (Introduction, vii; cf. also FIELD 1977, 235–6, 269–70, 274). The view surveyed by the fictive N outside his window in ex. [175] below corresponds rather interestingly with the description given by the author of his real-life surroundings in the early years of the 1940's:

> It is one of the most perfect pleasures I know of – to open the window wide on a muggy night and watch [the moths] come. Each has its own lamp-side manner: one will settle quietly on the wall to be boxed in comfort, another will dash and bang against the lampside before falling with quivering wings and burning eyes upon the table [. . .]
> (Letters [August 9, 1942], 69)

Should we also mention that the address given by the author in this letter is "Craigie *Circle*" (*ibid;* my emphasis)? Cf. below n. 132.

[177] Across the lane, [. . .] I could [. . .] distinguish the glint of a special puddle (the one Krug had somehow perceived through the layer of his own life), an oblong puddle invariably acquiring the same form after every shower because of the constant spatulate shape of the depression in the ground.
(217)

An identical shape was perceived by the hero immediately at the outset of the narrative:

[178] An oblong puddle inset in the coarse asphalt; like a fancy footprint filled to the brim with quicksilver; like a spatulate hole through which you can see the nether sky.
(1)

This turns out to be one of the key correlations between the two principal levels in the novel. What it provides is both a boundary and a direct link between the fictive hero and his creator:

[179] [. . .] a rent in [Krug's] world leading to another world of tenderness, brightness and beauty.
(VN's own comment in Introduction, xi)

The motif assumes multiple guises in the course of Krug's life-history. During the prolonged dream concerning his schooldays in Chapter Five, a "special inkstain in the shape of Lake Malheur" (56) appears on the lid of his desk – bearing a resemblance, it is suggested, to the "hourglass-shaped blot[s]" (62) reproduced by Paduk's writing-machine. On another level of the narrated reality, the milk spilled on Paduk's desk at the Ekwilist headquarters again takes the outline of "a kidney-shaped white puddle" (133).[128] Conferring with Paduk during the same scene Krug discovers that "the left glass [of his spectacles] showed a dim spiral nebula in the middle not unlike the imprint of a ghostly thumb" (132). Further on, as Krug is fetching his son from school, the latter deliberately steps in a rain puddle, and his shoe becomes filled with water (143). Also a document offered to Krug during the faculty meeting in Chapter Four carries an inkblot resembling "a fancy footprint or the spatulate outline of a puddle" (48). Krug himself later plans writing a philosophical treatise with "a vague shoe-shaped outline" (140). And immediately prior to his demise, at the precise moment when N is about to assume overt control, he once more perceives the familiar shape:

[180] [. . .] a separate pale gleam like the footprint of some phosphorescent islander [. . .] breaking the darkness.[129]
(209)

Thematic Import

Let us recapitulate on the basis of these findings. *Bend Sinister* presents us with a case of Nabokovian "anti-polyphony" taken to its parodic extreme. The whole novel consists of different methods for making explicit N-agent's control over his invented hero. These

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128. Which also harks back to the writing-desk setting. In the penultimate paragraph it is told that N has kept a glass of milk on his table while working on the narrative (217).

129. The occurrence of the emblematic footprint also alludes, one may presume, to the central moment in *Robinson Crusoe* when the hero discovers that he is no longer alone on his island. Similarly Krug becomes aware by degrees of the hidden markers of N-agent's presence behind the fabric of his reality – and it is this realization that renders him insane at the last lap of the narrative.

were seen to include a large selection of devices that we would normally associate with the omniscient, self-advertising N of the classical narrative (exs. [160]–[170]). In addition, the narrative was found to incorporate instances in which the hero's and N-agent's situations correlate, suggesting an essential dependence of one reality-plane upon the other (exs. [171]–[180]).

As a consequence, *Bend Sinister* comes to contain not only a single history, but in fact two: one in which the hero is shown waging his battle against the apparatus of the Ekwilist state, and another one altogether, centering on N-agent's efforts to order his materials into a coherent structure.[130]

The first story is that of a full-scale defeat. Krug repeatedly fails to apprehend correctly his reality, misinterpreting even the most obvious anticipations of a disaster (planted in the text behind his back by N), as well as the hidden clues pointing to the possibility of an escape.[131] By choosing to ignore the very tangible threat posed by the totalitarian state ("Nothing can happen to Krug the Rock" [79], "I do not believe in pistols" [111], etc.), Krug dooms not only himself, but also his family and friends, and finally the best part of the intelligentsia in his home country. It is for this ultimate error in judgment that he is so cruelly punished in the book.[132]

The second story, on the other hand, is one of ultimate success, with N finishing his labor and gaining an absolute control over the created world. This ties together also many of the "theological" undertones occurring in the narrative. We recall that N himself takes the position of "an anthropomorphic deity" with regard to the narrated reality (above ex. [167]). The hero is named, specifically, "*Adam* Krug"; his son is given the biblical name of "David" (22 *passim*); and the motif of "apples" (e.g. 9, 49–50, 144, 198) is repeatedly employed in underlining the notion of a "paradise" that lies

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130. We may even speculate about the precise duration of this endeavor. In Chapter One, when Krug is offered his first view of the enigmatic "puddle", it must be daytime, since the puddle is said to be reflecting "a portion of pale blue sky" (1). On the next page the time is specified as "twenty minutes past four" (2), which presumably applies for N-agent's reality as well. By the time that the manuscript is finished it is night, and N hears a clock outside striking twice (217). Are we to surmise, then, that the fictive time-span during which the story is told covers a bare nine and half hours?

131. Take the case of a minor figure named "Phokus", who keeps occurring with a somewhat suspicious regularity in the margin of Krug's life. In Chapter Fifteen, not long before his final arrest, Krug avoids a meeting with "a student called Phokus" (158) on the basis that the latter might be a government spy. Previously, in Chapter Six, he has overheard fragments of a conversation that he now evidently disremembers: "retaliation . . . bombs . . . cowards . . . oh, Phokus, if I were a man . . ." (84). In the penultimate chapter, after Krug has been detained, rumors of his arrest are discussed by "the little group of anti-Ekwilist conspirators of which the student Phokus was leader" (195), but the moment for action is already past. It is indicated, in other words, that had the hero only been more receptive to the recurrent "themes" patterning his own life he might still have been saved.

132. Hence also the thematic motivation for the choice of his name. We have noted VN's uses of the "circle"-motif as an emblem for limited consciousness in the previous section on *The Gift* (above notes 78–9). In *Bend Sinister* several bilingual puns are based on the name (*krug* = 'circle' in Russian). E.g. "Professor Krug had been given full liberty [. . .] to circulate after dark" (9); " '[. . .] how stupid of me', thought Krug, the circle in Krug, one Krug in another one" (35); "Nobody can touch our circles [. . .]" (50). There is also a suggestive reference to "the circular dungeon" of consciousness (156) in Krug's own philosophic treatise.

beyond the hero's purview. Further, when it is told that N "felt a pity for Adam and slid towards him along an inclined beam of pale light" (above ex. [169]), the association with "God" is laid as bare as it can without spelling out the notion quite overtly. Returning to his own reality at the conclusion, N once more underscores the dominant status that he has now gained – pointing out that "the various parts of [his] *comparative paradise* [. . .] looked with perfect submission into [his] eyes" (217; my emphasis).[133]

Still, it is to be noted that the paradise is only a "comparative" one. The narrative in *Bend Sinister* is not designed merely to promote the notion of artistic omnipotence, but also to determine the limits imposed upon the literary artist outside his fiction. During the brief space devoted to N-agent's real-life surroundings in the concluding paragraphs (216–17), small indices crop up in the text, suggesting his concurrent loss of auctorial control. This applies to trivial occurrences on the plane of the perceived reality:

> [181] Some tower clock *which I could never exactly locate* [. . .]
> (217; my emphasis)
>
> [182] [. . .] the shadow of an arm was combing invisible hair; *or perhaps it was a movement of branches* [. . .]
> (*ibid;* my emphasis)

But it is equally true of the larger questions – concerning "the meaning of life" – that N ponders in his final remarks. These are the same problems that Krug has himself tried to solve in his "shoe-shaped" treatise (cf. 140, 152–6), and in the end it is conceded by N that his own solution remains just as vague:

> [183] *Possibly,* something of the kind may be said to occur in regard to the imprint we leave in the intimate texture of space.
> (*ibid;* emphasis as above)

So what is the thematic import of the novel? Like his fictive hero, the auctorial teller emerges as fully subject to the incertitudes of "real life" outside his narrative. Like Krug, he remains inescapably trapped by the boundaries determined by his finite human consciousness (cf. Krug's own attempt inside the narrative to write a treatise on "infinite consciousness" [172]). But, unlike the hero, he also manages to transgress these limitations by turning them into materials in a purely imaginative structure.

It is this essential distinction between the positions of N and C that finally gives a unifying sense to the overt – often outrageously overt – shows of foregrounded ND inserted into the text. They represent the auctorial teller's own efforts to leave behind his material study and to construe a world dependent on imagination alone. In this sense, at any rate, the novel emerges as one of the most explicit embodiments of the Nabokovian concern with "another world" underlying the canon.[134] The "world of tenderness, brightness and beauty" evoked by the author in his introductory comments to the novel (above ex. [179]) is recoverable only through the concrete activity of fiction-making that the narrative in *Bend Sinister* is in itself made to exemplify.

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133. VN has often played with the parallel between divine creation and artistic composition in his work. "Art is a divine game" (*Lectures 2,* 106), as he says in one of his public lectures. Already in *Mary* it was said of Ganin's mnemonic exercises that, as long as they lasted, he "was a god, re-creating a world that had perished" (33).

134. I refer again to our previous dissection of the Nabokovian "themes" in Introduction (0.4.).

2.3. *Subordination of CD to ND: Narrative Irony*

2.3.1. On NI as a Nabokovian Device

On NI

The two principal strategies determining the uses of N_E in the Nabokovian narrative have now been established.

(i) We have first observed a tendency towards maximal accommodation of ND to CD: an endeavor to present the narrated reality either as a purely subjective illusion in the minds of C-agents, or – in the case of *The Gift* – as a consciously created illusion with an artistic motivation of its own.

(ii) Secondly, we have examined a significant counter-tendency, regularly leading to an emphasis on pure markers of ND. The author's fiction was found to contain a repertory of devices through which narratorial control over the seemingly autonomous position of C may be foregrounded – although the limitations of the former may also be made the subject of a new discourse, as was concretely the case in our example from *Bend Sinister.*

It remains to analyse in more detail the concurrence of the two strategies within single textual segments. We shall next direct our attention to narrative patterns that are produced when (i) and (ii) are played against each other for the sake of underlining the subordination of C-agent's perceptual position to that of an extrinsic N. This problem will be studied under the heading of *narrative irony* (NI). It will be argued that many of the effects that we regard as most distinctively "Nabokovian" are based precisely on *an ironic clash between two points of view:* the higher one always belonging to the teller and the subordinate one to the hero, who nevertheless strives to apprehend reality from his more limited purview.[135]

Perception as a Theme

VN's concern with perceptual oppositions becomes manifest in the care with which various *failures* in apprehension are singled out in his writing. "A blissful incapacity for observation (and hence complete uninformedness about the surrounding world – and a complete inability to put a name on anything) is a quality quite frequently met with among the average Russian literati" (*G,* 299), muses Fyodor, giving voice to an assertion that is applied to a host of protagonists throughout Nabokovian fiction. "In Memory of L.I Shigaev" defines its protagonist as belonging to "[Russian] intelligentsia [. . .] the

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135. The effects brought about by such clashes have often been noted in literary theory. SHKLOVSKIJ (1921a, 151–4; 1921b, 44–6) denoted related phenomena with his notion of *nedorazumenie* (i.e. "confusion"), using examples from Sterne, Gogol's *The Government Inspector* and Russian folk-drama. The term "dramatic irony" is applied by many other investigators, who point out that dramatic literature in particular has always capitalized on ironic confusions between the main agents (e.g. BOOTH 1974, 63–7). Since it is the clash between the *narrating* agent and his invented heroes that constitutes our problem here, I prefer to use a somewhat more narrowly defined concept. For the notion of specifically "narrative" irony see SCHOLES-KELLOGG 1966, 240–1 (the chapter entitled "Point of View in Narrative" is entirely relevant to the question). Cf. also DOLEŽEL 1973a, 37–9; CHATMAN 1978, 155–7; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 79–80.

most unobservant race in the world" (*TD,* 168). In *Pnin* the hero is introduced as "not a very observant man" (148), and also Leontiev in "An Affair of Honor" is dismissed as "a ridiculously unobservant man" (*RB,* 111). Neither is this trait limited to Russian protagonists. In *Ada* it is Van Veen who describes Ada's former governess as "pathologically unobservant" (96); Kinbote in *Pale Fire* terms Gradus "exceptionally unobservant" (251); and while Dreyer in *King, Queen, Knave* is afforded a somewhat fuller share of perceptual skills, he is still "observant [only] in his own way" (33).

One is also reminded of the author's discourse on his own attempts to overcome the limitations of human perception from the opening chapter of *Speak, Memory:*

> [184] Over and over again, my mind has made colossal efforts to distinguish the faintest of personal glimmers in the impersonal darkness on both sides of my life. That this darkness is caused merely by the walls of time separating me and my bruised fists from the free world of timelessness is a belief I gladly share with the most gaudily painted savage. I have journeyed back in thought [. . .] to remote regions where I groped for some secret outlet only to discover that the prison of time is spherical[136] and without exits.
> (20)

Surely we would not err in concluding that such an effort to step from a lower plane of observation to a superior one – an attempt to "peer beyond [one's] own limits" (another phrase from *SM,* 50) – lies very close to the center of the author's artistic system. In VN's fiction it is specifically the hero's ability to "perceive" his world in accurate terms that is elevated into a major thematic problem.

Below, the narrative manifestations of this concern are examined. I shall first survey the devices employed by VN in opposing perceptual levels in his fiction. These instances will be classified into separate types of NI, although it should also be evident that in many of the studied texts much more than standard "irony" is involved. Rather, we might refer to an entire novelistic program grounded on the notion of competing points of view.[137] After this I shall examine *The Defense,* where the NI-strategy is directly linked with the Nabokovian view of life itself as an elaborate "game" that has been designed outside the purview of its participants.

2.3.2. NI Surveyed

There are two ways in which C-agents may be unobservant about their surroundings and, consequently, also two "kinds" of NI.

(i) NI_1. In the first instance, the reader usually has no difficulty in detecting the irony, for here C-agent's assessment is proven deficient by the immediate narrative context.

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136. Again the reverberating motif of a "circle". Compare this to Krug's vision of the "circular dungeon" constituted by human consciousness (above n. 132).

137. This is well expressed in a formula coined by IVASK: "Nabokov's characters can be divided into two general categories: the seeing and the blind" (1961, 135). In a review of *Vesna v Fial'te* KASHIN had similarly noted that VN *"gauges out the eyes of his protagonists in order to show that they are blind" (1957, 224). More systematic insights into the problem are given by ROWE (1971a) in his commentary on VN's use of "ironic prophesies" (viii–ix), or in a detailed listing of "Ironical Contexts" by BODENSTEIN 1977, 313–42. The question of irony is approached also in many discussions of the author's individual works – e.g. in the fine discussions of *Laughter in the Dark* by STUART 1970, 72–95 and 1978, 87–113. I have tried to concentrate on occurrences of NI that have not been formerly taken up by commentators.

There may even be straightforward declarations in ND specifying the hero's obtuseness (as in *Bend Sinister,* where it is told that "[Krug] might have guessed the answer, the simple answer [. . .]" [117]), or otherwise confirming our suspicions with regard to the reflecting mind ("[Albinus] was not a particularly gifted man" [*LD,* 5]). This is the type of NI that has sometimes been termed "simple irony" (SCHOLES-KELLOGG 1966, 241 ff.; BOOTH 1974, 47–86) and that we may also call *irony of situations,* since in these cases it is the narrated situation itself that contains the clues to its hidden meaning.

(ii) NI_2. The reader's task becomes more complicated when the clues do not occur simultaneously with C-agent's assessments, being instead strewn along lengthier stretches in the narrative. In such instances the irony is based on the hero's unawareness of the diverse "coincidences" that have been planted into his life-history. As the reader is at the same time required to construe this history on the basis of linkages within the actual narrative fabric, we may here coin the term *irony of correlations.* It is through the latter type of play with correlating motifs that many of the more memorable effects in VN's fiction are generated. For what the Nabokovian protagonists are constantly missing is not just a few coincidences. The most productive source of ironies in the author's work derives from the hero's unawareness of his entrapment within the parodistic, N-controlled design of the narrative itself.

Either variety of NI occurs throughout the studied corpus. I shall start with the less problematic cases.

NI_1: Irony of Situations

The classical instances of simple irony are seen in narrative texts that employ the viewpoint of a somehow "naive" hero. James's Maisie, in the well-known example of *What Maisie Knew,* or the various child-protagonists in Chekhov's or Faulkner's works can hardly be expected to assess their situations with the mature sophistication of their makers (CHATMAN 1978, 156–7; CHUDAKOV 1971, 115–16; COHN 1978, 250–1). Analogous settings have often been used by VN, who may exploit in his fiction not only the perspective of a child,[138] but also a range of mental and sensory handicaps – Albinus's blindness in *Laughter in the Dark,* Pnin's absent-mindedness in *Pnin,* Eugenia Isakovna's impaired hearing in "Breaking the News" – for the express purpose of building a contrast between naive and sophisticated versions of given narrative facts.

"Breaking the News" (*RB,* 37–44) provides us with a practically pure instance of this type, as here the whole poignancy of the story is made dependent on an exposition of the main facts immediately in the opening clauses. The remaining narrative emerges as a single, sustained exercise in NI_1, addressed in its entirety to the problem of transmitting to the heroine the "news" that is already known to the reader.

> [185] Eugenia Isakovna Mints was an elderly émigré widow, who always wore black. Her only son had died on the previous day. She had not yet been told.
> (37)

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138. E.g. throughout the first chapters of *The Defense* (34–6, 39–40 *passim*), where ten-year-old Luzhin is made to register the various phases in his father's affair with the red-haired aunt. Also "A Bad Day" and "Orache" are based on impressions transmitted through the mind of a child.

Quite similarly, in the opening chapter of *Pnin,* the hero's state of alienation becomes aptly punctuated through the overt contrast between his obtuseness and the better-informed vision belonging to N:

> [186] Now a secret must be imparted. Professor Pnin was on the wrong train. He was unaware of it, and so was the conductor, already threading his way through the train to Pnin's coach. As a matter of fact, Pnin at the moment felt very well satisfied with himself. (8)

Compare also the following grotesque scene from *Laughter in the Dark:*

> [187] At this moment Albinus and Rex were seated opposite one another in the little drawing-room into which the sunlight was streaming through the glass door leading to the terrace. Rex sat on a folding stool. He was stark naked. As a result of his daily sunbaths his lean but robust body with, on his breast, black hair in the shape of a spread eagle, was tanned a deep brown. Between his full red lips he held a long stalk of grass and, with his hairy legs crossed and his chin cupped in his hand (rather in the pose of Rodin's *Thinker*), he was staring at Albinus who, in return, seemed to be gazing at him quite intently.
>
> The blind man was wearing an ample, mouse-gray dressing-gown and his bearded face expressed agonized tension. He was listening – of late he had done nothing else but listen. Rex knew this and was watching how the man's thoughts were mirrored in his face as if that face had become one big eye since his actual pair of eyes had gone. One or two little tests might add to the fun: he slapped his knee softly, and Albinus, who had just raised his hand to his knitted brow, remained transfixed with uplifted arm. Then Rex bent slowly forward and touched Albinus's forehead very gently with the flowering end of the grass stem which he had just been sucking. Albinus sighed strangely and brushed away the imaginary fly. Rex tickled his lips and again Albinus made that helpless movement. This was good fun indeed.
> (177–8)

Perhaps the most thorough applications of such settings occur in *King, Queen, Knave,* where the triangle of a conventional love story has been transformed by the author into a powerful vehicle of irony.[139] Apart from exposing Franz, whose naivety is total, the novel concentrates on the respective failures in perception belonging to Martha and her husband. Precisely as Martha remains obtuse to the end with regard to Dreyer's infidelities (cf. 147, 153–4, 177, 205, 261 *passim*),[140] so also the latter misinterprets

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139. In his lecture on *Madame Bovary,* VN cites approvingly Flaubert's plan for the novel: "It will be the first time [. . .] that a novel appears where fun is made of the leading lady and her young man" (*Lectures 1,* 149). *King, Queen, Knave* takes up the parodistic formula with considerable vengeance. For the relationship between the two works cf. also above n. 26.

140. A characteristic instance is seen when "Ida" and "Isolda", the two twin sisters – later merged in Dreyer's mind into "Isida" (177) – are assessed in quick succession from the viewpoints of both husband and wife. The recurrence of the "back"-motif is symptomatic:

> [Martha] She was pleased to note how unresponsive Franz was to the practically naked charms of those two practically identical vulgar young things with revoltingly thin arms, and snaky backs, and insufficiently spanked little popos. (142)
>
> [Dreyer] [He] started to dance with one of the pretty sisters, and then caught up the other, and the girls giggled and curved their supple backs as he tried to dance with both together. (143)

The irony is underlined when Martha ponders the possibilities of a separation: "Let us suppose he gives me a divorce. Let us even suppose I catch him with a stenographer" (160). She does not know that Dreyer has already discovered I&I to be good mistresses "but hopelessly bad stenographers, both of them" (147).

every clue pointing towards the affair between his wife and Franz. The effect is further enhanced through the satiric stance that Dreyer himself adopts towards his rival: "Whoever sewed on that monogram was not a professional – at least not a professional seamstress" (186), he muses when viewing Franz's underwear, never realizing the true origin of the stitches (cf. the reference to "lovingly sewn-on monograms" on 103 plus 106, 117, 160, 221–2).

The same is true of clues connected with the subsequent murder-intrigue in the novel. Dreyer's gullible assertion that "[Martha] does not know the first letter of adultery" (175) immediately backfires, for she has just been shown consulting an encyclopedia for effectual means of eliminating her husband (162–3). Further on, Dreyer dreadfully misconstrues the "two perfectly human faces" (209) – those of the two would-be killers – that he glimpses in his garden. Related confusions arise from his decision to avoid wearing an expensive tie before the final boat trip ("Martha said it looked like rain and the tie would be ruined" [239]); from his reflections on Martha's promise that "[his burned back] would never hurt again" (236); or from his apprehension of Franz's "distraught appearance" (265) at the end of *King, Queen, Knave.*

Simple enough as they are, these ironies prove highly motivated in the larger context of Nabokovian writing. VN's narratives always take the form of a more or less flagrant comedy of errors, in the course of which the hero's efforts to apprehend his reality become undermined. At the same time, there exists a ready-made parallel between the hero's situation and the reader's search for a meaning from the actual ordering of the narrative. What may seem obvious to us as readers of the text – i.e. Dreyer's errors – is not so from the viewpoint of any hero living inside the fictive world. Life itself, it is suggested through these recurring instances, may perhaps divulge its ultimate meaning only when approached as a constructed "text", outside of which we may still retain our positions as extrinsic authors and readers.

The notion is stated in an all but overt form in our final example from *The Gift,* where the brief monologue by the dying Chernyshevski is cited. That the monologist utters his words while "the spring sun was playing" is a fact that can be known only to the auctorial figure behind the setting. And its deeper implications can be fully appreciated only by the reader, whom the author has here invited to share in his ironic vision:

> [188] The following day he died, but before that he had a moment of lucidity, complaining of pains and then saying (it was darkish in the room because of the lowered blinds): 'What nonsense. Of course there is nothing afterwards.' He sighed, listened to the trickling and drumming outside the window and repeated with extreme distinctness: 'There is nothing. It is as clear as the fact that it is raining.'
>
> And meanwhile outside the spring sun was playing on the roof tiles, and the sky was dreamy and cloudless, the tenant upstairs was watering the flowers on the edge of her balcony, and the water trickled down with a drumming sound.
> (296)

NI_2: Irony of Correlations

The parallel between the reader's position and that of the hero becomes qualified further with the second type of NI. No reader of a literary text wants to be naive. With respect to the Nabokovian narrative this means that the reader should manage to keep track of the multiple linkages that lie buried within its system. A typical text by the author is

always patterned according to a system of *internal correlations:* compositional symmetries, analogies between plot details, or recurrences of certain key-phrases at separate points in the discourse. Viewed from the hero's perspective, however, the same instances no longer describe merely formal relationships. What they rather represent are often the very focal points in the narrated life, directing our attention towards a hidden order that the hero has failed to perceive. It is for this reason that particular attention must be given to such "coincidences" here – for in the end this may be the only way in which we can ourselves escape the fate of the author's fictive heroes.[141]

A quite illustrative example of the method occurs already in "A Matter of Change", dating from the earliest period of VN's prose-writing (*TD,* 143–55). The story concerns the final episodes in the life of one "Aleksey Lvovich Luzhin".[142] Having emigrated from Russia in 1919 Luzhin has drifted across Europe, lost contact with his former background, and now serves as a waiter in the dining car of a German express train. The time of the action is specified as August 1, 1924 (cf. 143–5). Disheartened by the hardships of exile, the improbability of ever returning to his homeland, as well as by an incurable cocaine-habit, Luzhin evolves in his mind a plan to commit suicide, and the narrative closes with his placing his head between two railway cars and getting killed.

At the time of its writing the story was rejected by the émigré publishers because of its "controversial" nature.[143] As with the author's more mature work, however, the main import of the narrative is hardly contained in the events, but rather in the latent connections construed between them. "The first day of August ran its course" (145), observes N close to the opening of the story. It is on this precise day that Luzhin's wife Elena seats herself in the same train where the hero is preparing for his suicide. She has arrived from Russia two days earlier and is now on her way to search for her long-lost husband (146–50). That the two do not meet is merely "a matter of chance". Just when she is about to enter the dining compartment Elena is detained by a fellow-passenger, who accosts her. In the ensuing scuffle she loses her wedding ring and is finally compelled to flee back to her own wagon (152–4). The ring is afterwards found in the vestibule of the diner by one of Luzhin's German colleagues:

> [189] [Max] hid it in his waistcoat pocket and gave a quick look around to see if anyone had noticed. Luzhin's back was motionless in the doorway. Max cautiously took out the ring; by the dim light he distinguished a word in script and some figures engraved on the inside. 'Must be Chinese', he thought. Actually, the inscription read '1–VIII–1915 Aleksey'. He returned the ring to his pocket.
> (155)

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141. As readers we of course have the advantage of going over the text more than once, unlike the heroes who can only "live" inside it. The famous Barthesian dictum that a literary text should be read "as if it had already been read" (BARTHES 1970, 15) assumes particular validity when one sets out to decipher VN's ironic strategies.

142. The choice of the hero's name is less than coincidental, for this early story antecedes in many ways the novelistic pattern developed in *The Defense.* I shall return to this pattern immediately after my survey (in 2.3.3.).

143. According to VN's prefatory note (*TD,* 142) it was the detail of "cocaine" that caused the initial difficulties with publication. After its printing in an obscure Rigan magazine in 1924 the text was subsequently lost, resurfacing only in the second Field bibliography (FIELD 1973, 104). It has been formerly discussed by NAUMANN (1978, 92–104) who duly refers to the recurrent details, but does not, to my mind, pay sufficient attention to their ironic function.

In this way it transpires that had any of the principal C-agents been capable of making the necessary connections, Luzhin's demise could have been averted. If Elena had gone to the diner and recognized her husband; if Max had been able to read Russian or if he had shown the ring to his colleague; or if Luzhin himself had known what day it was – i.e. his wedding anniversary – he might have put off the suicide, and the reunion with his wife would have taken place after all.

The overall "gamble on causalities" (to borrow a good phrase from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* 90) looks directly toward the cultivation of this method in VN's major fiction. In "An Affair of Honor" we discover another early application, to my mind presenting the author already at his shrewdest.[144] Having learned of his wife's infidelity, Anton Petrovich decides to challenge his rival to a duel. Seeking possible seconds from the home of an acquaintance, he finds himself in the midst of a small party:

> [190] Mityushin let him in but he was drunk, and at first paid no attention to [Anton Petrovich's] livid face. A person unknown to [Anton Petrovich] sat in the small dim room, and a black-haired lady in a red dress lay on the couch with her back to the table, apparently asleep [. . .]. Mityushin, [. . .] indicating with a nod the generous back of the sleeping lady, remarked casually 'Adelaida Albertovna, I want you to meet a great friend of mine'.
> (87–8)

The name-motif keeps recurring in the narrative (89, 91), coming up for the last time only after the disgracefully ended duel, twenty pages later, as Anton Petrovich comes across another acquaintance:

> [191] Leontiev [. . .] spoke of how much he paid for his room, how hard it was to pay, how hard life was for him and his wife, how rarely one got a good landlady, how insolent theirs was with his wife.
>
> 'Adelaida Albertovna, of course, has a quick temper herself', he added with a sigh.
> (112)

Although the hero himself misses the connection, it would appear that behind his back a sly subthematic hint has again been introduced into the narrative. Had Anton Petrovich discerned in time that his spouse was not the only deceitful lady in the tale – had he realized, in other words, that even his prospective seconds were carrying on an affair with another man's wife[145] – he would surely have desisted from the farcical duel, and the ultimate dishonor might have been avoided.

Such is the basic method of NI_2 in the author's narratives, where any incidental details – names, dates, a variety of chance objects – may become interladen with a hidden meaning that eludes the perceptual range of the hero. An all but unlimited array of examples offers itself for inspection.

In "The Potato Elf" (*RB,* 221–51), the manifold references to black garments are given a distinctly ironic motivation. The motif of "blackness" is first introduced through

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144. The point-of-view technique in the story was described already above. Cf. 2.1.2.4. exs. [58]–[63].

145. In the original version the lady is named "Anna Nikanorovna" (AffH R; *VCh,* 109, 112, 134), but otherwise the pattern remains. NAUMANN errs, in her discussion of the Russian text, when she maintains that the story contains "nothing elliptical [. . .] no [. . .] withheld bits of information" (1978, 127). There are covert ironies even in VN's earliest, apparently simple narratives, and some of them may come off only fifty years after their making. I have elaborated this point in TAMMI 1980b, 1459–60.

the hero's unwitting point of view, as he observes "a tall lady all in black" (246) standing on his doorstep. Subsequently, while the lady herself is identified as Nora, the hero's one-time mistress, the significance of her attire remains unexplained. Passing mention is made e.g. of her black hat (*ibid*), dress (*ibid*), or of the "crumpled [. . .] glossy black gloves" (247) that she takes off for the duration of her visit (cf. also 248). Having informed her former lover that their affair has resulted in the birth of a son, Nora departs, but the hero is soon after her, eager to know more of the incident. Once more spotting the black-clad figure ahead him (251), he forgets about his heart condition (mentioned on 243–4, 249, 250), accelerates his pace, and finally collapses from a lethal stroke – himself now falling to the ground like "a crumpled black glove" (251).[146]

As in our previous example from "A Matter of Chance", it is only in the concluding phrases that the motivation behind the recurrences is disclosed. Had the hero been able to decipher the logical explanation for Nora's black garb, the lethal rush would have become unnecessary:

> [192] 'Leave me alone', said Nora in a toneless voice. 'I don't know anything. My son died a few days ago'.
> (251)

In *King, Queen, Knave,* the motif of Martha's "beige dress" is used to signal Franz's poor skills of detection: by all accounts, he never recognizes his mistress's habit of wearing this attire during those periods when she wishes to avoid intercourse (cf. 85–6, 92, 132–3, 153 for clues afforded to the reader). In *Glory*, recurring references to "slippers" are similarly applied in ridiculing Martin, who remains unaware for a large part of the novel of Sonia's romance with the poet Bubnov. The reader is again given a covert clue, when Bubnov discourses to Martin on the subject of women:

> [193] A woman's charm is a terrible thing – you understand me, terrible. And her poor little slippers are worn at the heel, yes, worn down –
> (142)

Afterwards we receive a glimpse of Sonia's apparel from Martin's ever obtuse point of view:

> [194] At home she wore an old black velvet dress with a narrow leather belt around the hips and backless slippers with frayed pompons.
> (151; for further occurrences of the motif cf. 187, 191)

A noticeable "slipper"-recurrence figures also in *Bend Sinister.* Being led to the conference in Ekwilist headquarters, Krug is proffered a selection of footwear to choose from:

> [195] [. . .] a number of seedy-looking pumps, a girl's tiny slipper trimmed with moth-eaten squirrel fur, some bloodstained arctics, brown shoes, black shoes and even a pair of half boots with screwed on skates.
> (125)

The absurdity of this list functions as a snare – for the hero as well as the reader – since the passage again contains a premonition that is sinister indeed. In a later excerpt

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146. Premonitions of the hero's fate have also occurred in earlier parts of the story. Before Nora's visit the hero was already shown walking "slightly sleep-rumpled, wearing [. . .] a little black dressing gown" (245). The phonetic play – *rumpled/crumpled* – enhances the association.

Krug's consciousness mechanically registers the noises caused by his new maid, but the latent connection still eludes him. Mariette will be overtly identified as a government spy only four chapters later:

> [196] The slow languid sounds and half-hearted thumps coming from the next room meant that Mariette was engaged in expressing her vague notions of order. He heard the sloppy thread of her old bed slippers trimmed with dirty fur.
> (141)

In *Invitation to a Beheading,* finally, Cincinnatus's entrapment within the emblematic prison becomes underlined through his failure to apprehend the ruses thought up by his jailers.[147] M. Pierre himself comments on "the amusing mystification" (173) that is required from the headsman, and covert references to his disguise keep turning up at various points in the narrative. He is introduced to Cincinnatus as a "colleague" (82, 85, 151, 153) or as a "fate-mate" (16). In other instances he tells his unsuspecting victim that "[they] shall mount the scaffold together" (111; cf. also 110, 152) and – after his show of gymnastics – that one day "[he] shall be honored [. . .] to show [Cincinnatus] certain further interesting [. . .] demonstrations of agility and astounding muscular development" (118). Still elsewhere, the setting is telescoped into an ironic pun, as M. Pierre asserts that Cincinnatus should know himself "what lies ahead" (145). Compare also the rather ambiguous admiration that he expresses for Cincinnatus's wife:

> [197] I caught just a glimpse of your spouse – a juicy little piece, no two ways about it – what a neck, that's what I like.[148]
> (144)

Only at the end of *Invitation to a Beheading* does the hero himself become aware of these deceptions. And even then, it is indicated in the thoroughly a-realistic conclusion, this feat requires that he at the same time steps outside his perceived level of reality altogether (i.e. by dying, cf. 222–3). It is not until the entire world of the fiction crumbles about him – as it does about Krug in the related conclusion to *Bend Sinister* – that Cincinnatus may freely aspire towards a higher position, from which all correlations are apprehended.

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147. As in *Bend Sinister,* the motif of "prison" is here made to represent the hero's own consciousness. The linkage is made overt in Krug's philosophic musings. Compare e.g. the following familiar-sounding simile: "Do all people have that? A face, a phrase, a landscape, an air bubble from the past suddenly floating up as if released by the head warden's child from a cell in a brain while the mind is at work on some totally different matter?" (*BS,* 159; my emphasis). In Chapter Fifteen of *Invitation to a Beheading* Cincinnatus is quite similarly led from his cell to a deceptive freedom by the prison-director's daughter (cf. 165–6).

148. ROWE amusingly misinterprets this passage in his curious list of "Nabokov's Erotic Necks" (1979b, 54). M. Pierre appreciates necks because of his profession, of course, not simply as objects of some misguided eroticism. Cf. his further interest in "the neck region" (*IB,* 146) of a chess knight during the game with Cincinnatus.

2.3.3. NI as a Structural Principle: The System of Motif-Correlation in *The Defense*

Chess-Composition and Narrative-Making

In *The Defense,* the play with correlations becomes motivated through a characteristically Nabokovian notion: an analogy between the composition of an artistic text and the composition of a chess problem. It is not difficult to find related pairings elsewhere in the author's canon. Already the early, uncollected cycle "*Tri shakhmatnykh soneta*" ("Three Chess-Sonnets" [1924]) revolves around the metaphor of *"composing a sonnet on a chessboard" ("[. . .] *na doske sostavil ja sonet*"). In *The Gift,* it is Fyodor who compares a chess problem to a "sonnet" (165). This comparison is expanded in *Speak, Memory,* where the author overtly parallels the goals of a problemist and those assigned to the writer of "a first-rate work of fiction" (290; cf. 288–93). In tracing the outline of Gogol's art in *Nikolai Gogol* the author reportedly chose "as basic rhythm of [the] book the *en passant* move of the Pawn" (*Letters* [August 9, 1942], 68), and similar cues keep reoccurring with a number of his own works of fiction.[149] Also *Poems and Problems* accommodates eighteen problems, placed side by side with fifty-three poems. In his Introduction to the collection VN returns once more to the underlying assumption:

> [198] Chess problems demand from the composer the same virtues that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity and splendid insincerity.
> (15)

On the other hand, this notion is familiar to us also outside Nabokovian poetics. Chess is in itself a time-honored metaphor, favored by writers of fiction and literary theory alike. There is a certain significance in the fact that the same analogy was often put forward precisely by VN's Russian Formalist contemporaries – among others by SHKLOVSKIJ. In his study of plot-composition we read:

> I venture to introduce a comparison. The action of a literary work is carried on a specific field; the character-types – masks, the roles in modern theatre – would correspond to the pieces in chess. The [plot-patterns] correspond to gambits, i.e. the classical moves of this game, which players may use in variants. The tasks and the peripeteias correspond to the role of the opponent's moves.[150]
> (1919a, 49–50; 1919b, 70)

It is, I would tentatively suggest, in a predominantly "Shklovskian" sense that VN has exploited the chess-metaphor in his fiction. Many former critics have been led to search for somewhat overly specific parallels between Nabokovian prose style and given

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149. E.g. the remark on the composition of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:* "That twisted quest [. . .] with its gloriettes and self-mate combinations" (*SM,* 257). On *Glory:* "The result reminds me of a chess problem I once composed" (Foreword, xiii). Or on "Christmas": "[The story] oddly resembles the type of chess problem called 'self-mate' " (*DS,* 152). Cf. also the note on Chapter Six: VIII: 1. 2 of *Onegin:* "The position of the chess pieces now arrived at by Pushkin is inconsistent with the plan behind the first moves of the game" (*EO* 3, 15).

150. An identical formulation occurs in an essay by REFORMATSKY 1922, 89. Still, we recall that the chess-metaphor was used already in de Saussure's famous discussion of linguistic systems. One should note that these notions were very much in the air when VN began his career.

properties of the game. Not content with noting the frequency of chess-tropes and allusions as an element of the author's style,[151] analysts have themselves resorted to chess-notation in describing the complexities of plot in particular narratives. Moreover, some quite extensive attempts have been made to extract traces of actual problems composed by VN from the compositional patterning in his novels.[152]

One should hesitate before choosing the latter course in an approach to the specifically *narrative* problematics of the studied texts. As Shklovskij points out, it is only "the roles" of individual moves and those of compositional devices that may resemble one another. VN has himself never verified that any of his novels is plotted according to an actual game.[153] None of the novels comes to us with a set of preordained moves appended on its front page (as is the case in Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass,* an often suggested model), and one may wonder whether such supplements would have added anything to the interest of these texts as novels in their own right. Rather, it would seem that were we to reduce one text or another to the status of no more than a disguised game, this would lay the author susceptible to those very accusations of "emptiness" that his more inimical critics have always been wont to level.[154]

Neither should we push the analogy too far when studying *The Defense.* While this is the one Nabokovian novel where chess provides the essential subject matter in the narrative, even a most expert knowledge of the game will hardly enable us to grasp its thematic import. Below, it will be argued that the profusion of chess-allusions in the novel still functions as a means for promoting the author's pervasive concern with the role of artistic imagination in man's life. What is specifically opposed in *The Defense* is the hero's attempt to order the design of his life by aid of his own game-playing competence and *the superior order imposed by the auctorial teller on the design of the narrative itself.* This is essentially the same opposition that we have been following all through the present chapter. The result is a novelistic pattern that is nearly paradigmatic in its reliance on ironic devices – not a chess-game in disguise, but a "poem of motifs", to apply a phrase once used for another densely organized literary structure (DOLEŽEL 1971, 100; cf. also SHKLOVSKIJ 1919b, 71).

I shall seek to explicate this system with the concept of NI as it was developed in the foregoing survey.[155]

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151. Which is a valid observation. For listings of chess- and game-tropes in *The Defense* and elsewhere cf. BODENSTEIN 1977, 373–97; SAMPSON 1982. See also above, notes 27–8.

152. The first critic to suggest this approach was BERNHARD in an early article devoted to "chess-thematics" in *Lolita* (1964, 44–5 *passim*). The same line of analysis has been applied in a more detailed manner to a number of VN's other novels by PURDY 1968–9; GEZARI 1974; GEZARI-WIMSATT 1979; SHEIDLOWER 1979. For discussions of *The Defense* from this standpoint cf. PURDY 1968–9, 382–4; GEZARI 1974, 97–101. In an earlier essay UPDIKE (1965, 322) has catalogued all chess-games actually played in the course of the novel, but this still seems to get us nowhere.

153. On the contrary, he has expressly denied this (according to FIELD 1967, 138).

154. The procedure observed by PURDY (1968–9) is characteristic in this respect. He first proposes to explain *The Defense* by inquiring whether it "describe[s] an actual game, adumbrated in human moves" (383). Finding no one-to-one correspondences, however, he goes on to criticize the text for its "dullness and relative incoherence" (384).

155. While *The Defense* was the work that established the author's reputation among his Russian public (BERBEROVA 1970a, 225), early reviewers devoted little attention to its structural

The chess-like effects in *The Defense* are based on a consistent repetition of motifs and combinations of motifs. More precisely, these recurrences are made to represent the hero's own search for correlations between diverse points in his life-history. The novel traces the life of its principal hero, Grandmaster Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin, from his early school years in St. Petersburg until his death in Berlin some sixteen years later: at a crucial moment in his career Luzhin suffers a nervous breakdown, becoming obsessed by the belief that he himself is merely an object in a "game" where occurrences from the past are duplicated by his present experience. Failing to produce any feasible defense against his unknown opponent, Luzhin decides to "drop out of the game" (his own definition, cf. 198), and the novel actually concludes with his suicidal leap through the bathroom window of his apartment.

In this manner, Luzhin's efforts to discover the hidden "meaning" of his life by observing its recurrent patterns come to affect the concrete ordering of the plot in the narrative.[156] In his Foreword to the novel VN has helpfully compared the main plot-line to the "retrograde analysis" -type of problem in chess, in which the solver is required to infer from a given position of the pieces the moves leading to this particular combination (*Df,* 9). That the application of such a method is quite deliberate on the hero's part, comes to be underscored when his ruminations are paraphrased near the conclusion of the novel:

> [199] [. . .] as soon as his initial delight in having established the actual fact of the repetition had passed, as soon as he began to go carefully over his discovery, Luzhin shuddered. With vague admiration and vague horror he observed how awesomely, how elegantly and how flexibly, move by move, the images of his childhood had been repeated [. . .], but he still did not quite understand why this combinational repetition inspired his soul with such dread. He felt one thing keenly, a certain vexation that he had gone so long without noticing the cunning sequence of moves; and now, recalling some trifle – and there had been so many of them, and at times so skillfully presented, that the repetition was almost concealed – Luzhin was indignant with himself for not having reflected, for not taking the initiative, but with trustful blindness letting the combination unfold.
> (168)

At the same time, in a manner already familiar to us from our previous examples, the hero's search for the final truth about his existence is covertly subverted through narratorial inlays in the discourse. It is suggested to the reader that Luzhin has still not perceived the full intricacy of the design that is being unfolded behind the surface of his life. This effects in the novel a twofold set of correlations between motifs.

(i) There are, most obviously, several linkages in the narrative of which Luzhin remains fully cognizant, or which are in fact generated solely in his own, pattern-

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complexities. For samples of early criticism – centering mainly on the portrait given in the novel of life in emigration – cf. ZAJCEV 1929; NOVIK 1931; STRUVE 1930 and 1956, 286–7. As we just saw, neither have more recent investigators given much heed to the novel in its own terms. Apart from some quite valuable insights provided in a review by ADAMS (1965), plus remarks in VEJDLE (1936, 239) and KHODASEVICH (1937, 99), narrative structuring in *The Defense* has remained unanalyzed for the impressive span of more than fifty years. Cf. also below n. 163.

156. This was very shrewdly observed by KANTOR in his article on the theme of "memory" in VN's early fiction: *"All through his life Luzhin as if tries to remember something important, and to find once and for all the solution to the problem of his existence" (1934, 126).

obsessed mind. (ii) But there are also other instances, in which narrative segments mysteriously correlate and interlink without Luzhin's ever taking conscious notice of the combination. Accordingly, these two cases will be termed *C-generated correlations* and *N-generated correlations.* It is the interplay between (i) and (ii) that constitutes the narrative dynamics – the innate "poetry" – in *The Defense.* We may dissect this pattern further by examining some of its particular manifestations.

C-Generated Correlations

A prototypically Nabokovian protagonist, the hero in *The Defense* is gifted with a highly developed propensity to discern links between temporally remote phenomena. This is indicated in the novel through a constant emphasis on his experiences of *déjà vu.* Already as a child Luzhin is haunted by the feeling that "all this had happened once before" (48; cf. also 49, 54–5). Similarly, when he makes his acquaintance with the future Mrs. Luzhina by accidentally shedding his handkerchief (68), he afterwards keeps watching "to see whether she would drop anything – as if trying to establish some secret symmetry" (69). These instances are evolved in the novel to the point that NW as a whole presents itself to us as a composite of hidden symmetries, determined solely by the hero's subjective vision. (It is not for nothing, we recall, that his name "rhymes with 'illusion' " [Foreword, 7].)

(i) *Motifs of Escape.* The numerous correlations between the setting of Luzhin's final breakdown in Berlin (111–12) and that of his flight to the Luzhin family manor in his childhood (15–18) are an evident outcome of his own mental delirium. The connection between the two "escapes" becomes manifest e.g. in the following segments, dictated in either instance by the frenzied state of the reflecting mind:

> [200] [Russia] He [. . .] started to run with vague vengeful thoughts of getting back to the manor: he would hide there, he would spend the winter there, subsisting on cheese and jam from the pantry.
> (17)
>
> [201] [Berlin] The mysterious pursuit had been left far behind [. . .] Soon there would be the river, and the sawmill, and then the manor house would peep through the bare bushes. He would hide there and would live on the contents of large and small glass jars.
> (112)

(ii) *The Black-Bearded Peasant.* It is a logical development of (i) that when Luzhin later awakes from his delirium, he himself makes the association between the "black Assyrian beard" (122) of the psychiatrist who treats him and the "black-bearded peasant from the sawmill" (18) who had initially put an end to his flight in Russia. The peasant is further designated as a "future inhabitant of [Luzhin's] future nightmares" (*ibid*), and also the psychiatrist is likened to "an inhabitant of [. . .] nightmares" (124) – a rather characteristically satiric association on the part of the author himself as well (cf. his lampoon of psychoanalysis in Foreword, 9–10).

(iii) *The Buried Chess Set.* After Luzhin's awakening in (ii), a variety of sights and sounds at the hospital garden are linked in his mind to the Russian childhood. "I once buried something under those trees" (124), he muses while observing the swaying branches outside his window. The reference is once more to the Luzhin manor, in the garden of

which the ten-year-old hero buried his father's chess set after his passion for the game had been discovered (51–2). The correlation is enhanced through the motif of "fir trees", symmetrically limning either episode (45, 51, 124).

(iv) *Initiation into Chess.* Another chess set figures in the scene built around Luzhin's meeting with the Soviet visitors in Chapter Thirteen. Wishing to entertain the visitors' small son, he produces from his pocket a miniature chessboard. When lights suddenly go out in the apartment, a hidden combination is again engendered in his mind. The recalled episode concerns Luzhin's initiation into chess in St. Petersburg almost two decades earlier (for the original scene cf. the third chapter, 31–3). The association is entirely dependent on the hero's point of view:

> [202] Luzhin started and banged the board shut. His terrible little double, little Luzhin, for whom the chess pieces had been set out, crawled over the carpet on his knees . . . All this had happened once before. . . . And again he had been caught, had not understood how exactly the repetition of a familiar theme would come out in practice.
> (172)

(v) *The Wax Dolls.* A fateful repetition is planted even into Luzhin's deliberate attempt to interfere with the symmetry of this pattern.

> [203] After the very first turn he stopped the taxi, paid, and set off home at a leisurely pace. And here it suddenly seemed to him that he had done all this once before and he was so frightened that he turned into the first available store, deciding to outsmart his opponent with a new surprise. The store turned out to be a hairdresser's, and a ladies' one at that. Luzhin, looking around him, came to a halt, and a smiling woman asked him what he wanted. 'To buy . . .' said Luzhin, continuing to look around. At this point he caught sight of a wax bust and pointed to it with his cane (an unexpected move, a magnificent move). 'That's not for sale', said the woman. 'Twenty marks', said Luzhin and took out his pocketbook. 'You want to buy that dummy?' asked the woman unbelievingly, and somebody came up. 'Yes', said Luzhin and began to examine the waxen face. 'Careful', he whispered to himself, 'I may be tumbling into a trap!' The wax lady's look, her pink nostrils – this also had happened before.
> (191–2)

What the hero has hit upon – and what the reader is led to perceive through the hidden clues – is the precise parallel between ex. [203] and a much earlier episode, during which Luzhin similarly gets out of a cab, avoids a scheduled appointment, and sets out towards an unexpected destination (his aunt's house, where he will be taught the rules of chess, cf. 38–40). Here, too, the coincidence is punctuated through reiteration of particular motifs: the "frizzled heads of three waxen ladies with pink nostrils" (39) at the hairdresser's window in St. Petersburg find their counterparts in Berlin two decades later. Neither is it out of keeping with the system of coincidences that when Luzhin finally reaches his aunt's house he finds that her own "hair [is] not yet done" (40).

N-Generated Correlations

Alongside the first group of markers, suggesting that the narrative represents mainly the hero's private delusions, there emerges another series, carrying with it a counter-suggestion. Perhaps Luzhin's fears are not entirely baseless after all? Perhaps reality – in the sense of the narrated reality of this specific novel – indeed is a "game" manipulated outside the hero's range of perception?

The following instances should be carefully noted by the reader. (At one point N all but coaxes his reader to seek out the repetitions in the narrative: it is told that Luzhin himself used to replay previous games in his mind "like a reader checking a detail in a novel" [44]).

(i) *"Picture"-Correlations.* It is a major device in VN's novels to construe hidden correlations between various fictive artifacts – pictures, films, plays, or any other embedded "texts"[157] – and the outer frame of the narrated reality itself. In *The Defense,* this occurs when Luzhin makes his first visit to the home of his in-laws in Berlin. In the course of the episode his gaze takes in a random selection of details. Among these:

> [204] [. . .] a large, vivid oil painting that caught the eye. Luzhin, who normally did not notice such things, gave his attention to it because it was greasily glossed with electric light and the colors dazed him, like a sunstroke. A village girl in a red kerchief coming down to her eyebrows was eating an apple, and her black shadow on a fence was eating a slightly larger apple. 'A Russian *baba*', said Luzhin and laughed.
> (93–4)

The hero's response indicates that he remains unaware of the inbuilt repetition, which the reader is hence left to decipher on his own. An identical scene was encountered more than sixteen years (or eighty pages) earlier, at the onset of the Luzhins' journey back to St. Petersburg:

> [205] [Luzhin] waited a while and then turned and walked to the edge of the tracks. To the right a small girl sat on an enormous bale eating a green apple, her elbow propped in her palm.
> (15)

The inaccessibility of such instances to Luzhin's reflecting mind becomes still more pronounced with the second picture-correlation in the novel, for here he no longer possesses even the basic facts involved in the repetition. Inspecting with his fiancée their future apartment, Luzhin again takes notice of certain decorative items:

> [206] The lamp turned out to be in the Mauritanian style, the curtains over the windows were yellow, promising a deceptive sunlight in the mornings – and a woodcut in the wall space between the windows showed a child prodigy in a nightgown that reached to his heels playing on an enormous piano, while his father, wearing a gray dressing gown and carrying a candle, stood stock-still, with the door ajar.
> (136–7)

This coincides, somewhat miraculously, with the wishful reverie in the mind of Luzhin's own father concerning his chess-playing son. The scene is never actualized on the concrete NW-plane of the novel:

> [207] [. . .] more than once, in a pleasant dream resembling a litograph, [Luzhin Sr.] descended with a candle at night to the drawing room where a *Wünderkind,* dressed in a white nightshirt that came down to his heels, would be playing on an enormous, black piano.[158]
> (19)

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157. For a more systematic explication I refer to 3.2.2. below.

158. A further correlation: on the wall of the Luzhin manor there also hangs "a daguerrotype of [Luzhin's] maternal grandfather – black sidewhiskers, violin in hand" (17). This may account in part for the paternal ambitions, but not for the reoccurrence of a related picture in Berlin.

(ii) *Motion Pictures.* After the wedding Luzhin is taken to a variety of amusements by his wife, who wishes to keep his mind away from the painful chess memories (146–52). One day they see a movie, the contents of which are described in some detail in a narratorial paraphrase:

> [208] The picture ran on in a white glow and finally, after many adventures, the girl returned – now a famous actress – to her parents' house, and paused in the doorway, while in the room, not seeing her yet, her grizzled father was playing chess with the doctor, a faithful friend of the family who had remained completely unchanged over the years. In the darkness came the sound of Luzhin laughing abruptly. 'An absolutely impossible position for the pieces', he said, but at this point, to his wife's relief, everything changed [. . .]
> (150–1)

The reoccurrence of the chess-motif, alarming Mrs. Luzhina, is even more portentous than can be surmised by anyone within the narrative. For the same scene harks directly back to the games played by Luzhin's father with "the gloomy country doctor" (52; cf. 50–3) before the onset of his son's career. The repetition lies again outside the control of the hero's consciousness.

Consider also another correlation between an embedded movie and the narrated reality. Seated in Valentinov's office just before his suicide, Luzhin happens to lay his eyes on a batch of cinematic stills scattered on the table:

> [209] On one there was a white-faced man with lifeless features and big American glasses, hanging by his hands from the ledge of a skyscraper – just about to fall in the abyss.
> (194)

Afterwards, ascending the stairs of his Berlin house for the ultimate leap, Luzhin himself feels as if he "[were] climbing a skyscraper" (196).

(iii) *"School"-Motifs.* The occurrence of various reminders from Luzhin's school years at later phases of his life, while hardly remarkable as such, still enhances our impression of his entrapment within a distinctly literary design. The references to the "quiet" classmate, said to have lost an arm in the Russian Civil War, keep recurring throughout the narrative with the persistence of a *Leitmotiv:*[159] his recollections of Luzhin are twice cited by N (23–4, 37); it is revealed that he once belonged to the circle of Mrs. Luzhina's acquaintances (cf. her recollections on 71); and he crops up once more in the discourse uttered by Petrishchev, another classmate, during the émigré ball in Berlin (156). Similarly, Luzhin's former teacher of geography (cf. 36–7, 38–9, 53) is evoked from Mrs. Luzhina's point of view (70) as well as from that of Petrishchev (156). After his breakdown Luzhin himself tries taking up geography as a hobby (146–7), realizing only too late that this, too, "was part of the combination" (169).

(iv) *Hobbies.* The latter holds true for many of the other pastimes chosen by the hero during his period of recuperation. He attempts drawing and manages to produce several caricatures of his wife and both in-laws (162–3). This clearly repeats the earlier scene between ten-year-old Luzhin and his French governess from Chapter One:

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159. UPDIKE has also drawn attention to the recurrence, but he sees in it only an instance of "Nabokov's teasing of cripples, not the most sympathetic of his fads" (1965, 326). This is a typical example of a critic's overlooking the internal, NI-function of a motif in favor of interences drawn about the author's personal "fads".

[210] [. . .] and slowly, with growing horror, the governess stretched toward [. . .] the unbelievable caricature.
(12)

Compiling the list of his favorite reading Luzhin becomes enmeshed in the same design: the Conan Doyle and Verne books that his wife acquires (130) duplicate the discovery of "[the] exact and relentlessly unfolding pattern" (26) from those very works already in his early childhood. Even the untitled novel – featuring "a schoolboy who had run away from home together with a dog" (127) – that Mrs. Luzhina associates in her own mind with Luzhin's recovery is covertly linked with the former school years. A page ripped from Luzhin Sr.'s "*Tony's Adventures*" during a classroom scuffle has already carried a picture of "a bright-eyed schoolboy on a street corner feeding his luncheon to a scruffy dog" (23), and Luzhin was himself nicknamed "Tony" by his classmates (*ibid;* cf. also 156).

(v) *Windows.* "The frosted-window theme" (8) is singled out by the author in his Foreword to the novel. As it develops, the motif is here specifically manipulated to point beyond the hero's comprehension.[160] Glass surfaces, rectangular openings, doors and windows, function everywhere in the novel as covert prefigurations of the concluding scene (e.g. 17, 31, 56, 67, 72, 79–80, 124, 135, 137 *passim*). At the same time, the recurrences serve to confirm that Luzhin's final attempt to break out of the N-generated design has also been anticipated on the plane of his own reality. As Luzhin swings a chair towards the bathroom window he notices "a black, star-shaped hole appear[ing] in the frosted glass" (200). Compare this to his previous encounter with the same shape, clinching a final link in the series that has now taken him to his doom:

[211] Through the glass of the door, between the cast-in iron rays of the star-shaped grille, he saw his father [. . .] take leave [. . .] and disappear through the gate.[161]
(22)

Thematic Import

The Defense causes its reader to vacillate between two interpretations, either of them valid to a point, but tending to cancel out one another when brought together. In the first instance the novel is regarded as a more or less "realistic" narrative. The multiple coincidences in the hero's life are taken to derive from his own imagination, and the novel as a whole is read as a portrayal of his impending madness, culminating in a vision of the universe itself as a cosmic chess game arranged by an unknown opponent. The second reading in effect verifies the hero's suspicions: the universe contained in the novel *is* a stylized game, the functioning of which can be only partially grasped by the fictive mind.

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160. Analogously, in *Laughter in the Dark* N comments on Albinus's unawareness of "the queer part doors played in his [. . .] life" (cf. above ex. [136]).

161. There is an additional irony at work in the concluding scene. Examining the apartment before moving in, Luzhin and his fiancée have paid particular attention to the bathroom window:

The [. . .] window, whose lower part was of sparkly blue-frosted glass, turned out to be cracked in its upper, transparent part and a new pane had to be put in.
(137)

As it will turn out, it is the same pane that Luzhin shatters prior to making his final leap.

Above, I have attempted to show that the evidence furnished in the text in support of the realistic reading (i.e. exs. [200]–[203]) is always counterbalanced by markers through which this interpretation may be refuted (exs. [204]–[211]).[162] Luzhin's "mysterious opponent" (191) is not merely a figment or a paranoid fantasy. But neither is the opponent "real" in the sense that the hero himself would seem to be opting for. (Compare the opposition in his own mind between "real chess life" [105] and a less tangible "dream [. . .] life" [194] that exists outside the game.)

Rather, we should claim that the design perceived by Luzhin is more directly emblematic of the actual narrative-making process. While this would be a trivial statement in the case of a conventional novel – where *any* design imposed on the history derives from N-agent's choices – the question becomes interesting in *The Defense* where the hero is made to take active notice of the choices occurring above him. Precisely as the Nabokovian N bases his narrative on a system of hidden correlations, so also Luzhin seeks from his life ever new symmetries and combinations. This is why it was so important to distinguish between those instances in the text that are accessible to Luzhin's point of view and those that are not: together they produce the rare spectacle of a fictive hero trying to "defeat" his maker by constructing an imaginative structure of his own. It is the contrast between these two creative efforts that provides the deepest thematic layer in the novel.

The Defense may differ quite radically in its surface features from the overtly a-realistic setting in *Bend Sinister* – or from the infinitely regressing one of *The Gift* – but it still serves to embody some of the most essentially Nabokovian concerns. Like Fyodor in *The Gift,* Luzhin also strives to structure the raw materials of experience according to his particular talent. And like Krug in *Bend Sinister,* he is afforded recurring intimations of the higher auctorial consciousness that resides beyond the plane of his everyday reality.[163]

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162. It is noticeable that most critics writing on the novel have unerringly chosen the first alternative. Variations of the insanity-reading are put forward at least by STRUVE 1930, 3; FIELD 1967, 180; ROWE 1971a, 81; LEE 1976, 49–50; HYDE 1977, 78–9; BODENSTEIN 1977, 383. One does not wish to argue outright for Luzhin's "sanity", of course. Clearly his is not a healthy state of mind – as has been pointed out by VN himself in his remarks on the novel ("[it] deals with a defense invented by an insane chess player" [*SM,* the caption facing 256]; see also Foreword to *Df,* 8). But just as clearly his case is not in the order of the more familiar varieties of madness known to us e.g. from Dostoevskij's fiction.

163. Compare ADAMS: "As for that cunning antagonist whom [. . .] Luzhin senses behind the play [. . .] – surely that is the author himself" (1965, 18). We might add that this contrast is still enhanced in the novel through the numerous comparisons of the hero to a "writer" or an "artist". On the latter point cf. also the afore-cited essays by VEJDLE 1936, 239 and KHODASEVICH 1937, 99. (On the Vejdle-Khodasevich hypothesis cf. 0.4.) Consider e.g.:

> Luzhin's present plight was that of a writer or composer who, having assimilated the latest things in art at the beginning of his active career and caused a temporary sensation with the originality of his devices, all at once notices that a change has imperceptibly taken place around him, that others, sprung from goodness knows where, have left him behind in the very devices where he recently led the way [. . .]
> (76–7)

Other variations of the artist-metaphor occur on 49, 69, 70, 72, 102, 107–9, 167–8. Luzhin Sr., the writer of children's books, also represents an "artist" in the novel, but he is quite obviously inferior to his maker. As it is told, he never succeeds in finding for his work "a definite design" (64).

The latter markers are inserted into the text mainly under the guise of "coincidences" (discussed above), but on occasion the references to N-agent's auctorial control may be more direct. The following is an all but overt reference, couched in the form of Luzhin's own meditation:

> [212] In general, life around him was so opaque and demanded so little effort of him that it sometimes seemed someone – a mysterious, invisible manager – continued to take him from tournament to tournament; but occasionally there were odd moments, such quietness all around, and when you looked out into the corridor – shoes, shoes, shoes, standing at all the doors, and in your ears the roar of loneliness.
> (76)

The mention of "invisible manager" is reminiscent of the manifold references to the "nameless, mysterious genius" threaded throughout the narrative in *Bend Sinister* (above 2.2.3.1.). It also coincides with a series of similar, teasingly half-concealed hints occurring elsewhere in the studied corpus. One may recall here the musings assigned to Axel Rex in *Laughter in the Dark:*

> [213] Rex reflected [. . .] that [. . .] it was merely the first item in the programme of roaring comedy at which he, Rex, had been reserved a place in the stage manager's private box. The stage manager of this performance was neither God nor devil. The former was far too gray, and venerable, and old-fashioned; and the latter, surfeited with other people's sins, was a bore to himself and to others [. . .]. The stage manager whom Rex had in view was an elusive, double, triple, self-reflecting magic proteus of a phantom, the shadow of many-colored glass balls flying in a curve, the ghost of a juggler on a shimmering curtain. . . . This, at any rate, was what Rex surmised in his rare moments of philosophic meditation.
> (118)

Or *King, Queen, Knave:*

> [214] That little trip to Pomerania Bay was in fact proving to be quite a boon for everyone concerned, including the god of chance [. . .], once you imagined that god in the role of a novelist or playwright [. . .]
> (224)

It is appropriate that the narrative in *The Defense* is brought to its conclusion with still another suggestion of N-agent's controlling presence above the hero. Hanging from the window-sill, Luzhin takes one last look at the world in which he has led his existence:

> [215] Before letting go he looked down. Some kind of hasty preparations were under way there: the window reflections gathered together and leveled themselves out, the whole chasm was seen to divide into dark and pale squares, and at the instant when Luzhin unclenched his hand, at the instant when icy air gushed into his mouth, he saw exactly what kind of eternity was obligingly and inexorably spread out before him.
> (201)

The hero vanishes into the narrative pattern, "obligingly" and "inexorably"[164] designed to thwart his every effort to assume control over his personal destiny. But in the Nabokovian narrative the failure of the hero also presents the triumph of his maker,

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164. The choice of the two epithets once more evokes VN's comparison of the chess-problemist's art to that of the fiction-writer. Both presuppose, he says in *Speak, Memory,* a mastery over "delusive opening moves, false scents, specious lines of play, *astutely and lovingly prepared to lead the would-be solver astray*" (290; my emphasis). This is an apt enough description of the central narrative dynamics of *The Defense* as well.

for out of the motifs that elude Luzhin the consciousness of the artist has created a new structure. As any protagonist in a novel – as any of us – Luzhin remains entrapped by the limitations of his subjective viewpoint, whereas only an artist possesses the talent to construct a world of which he himself is no longer a part. And this, it is suggested as the hero drops to his demise, may finally be the sole "defense" that we have when confronted by the ironies underlying our own existence.

2.4. *Epilogue to N_E: The Enigma of Narration in* ***Transparent Things***

VN's sixteenth novel presents us with a borderline case. Coming after several major texts based on the device of a memoiristic, highly individuated N (Humbert Humbert in *Lolita,* Shade and Kinbote in *Pale Fire,* Van Veen in *Ada*), *Transparent Things* would seem to describe a swerve back to those specific strategies that have been examined here under the heading of auctorial narration (N_E). The plain story-stuff in the novel – inconsequential as such – is transmitted to us through an agent who seems fully extrinsic to the action. The narrating agent may intrude into his own telling, digress on his narrative-making chores, or even take up his concrete presence behind the tale, but nowhere does he appear to be functioning on *the same* reality-plane as his hero (cf. his express reference to "[. . .] another [. . .] state of being" on 104). On the other hand, a closer scrutiny of N-agent's discourse in the novel will turn up some quite puzzling traces of the second (N_I–) type of narration, hence making the teller's identity into a separate problem to be solved by the reader.

It is this anomalous merging of the two categories of N, as I shall seek to demonstrate in the following, that has enabled the author to give an audaciously new form to those concerns that have always characterized his novelistic enterprise: the subordination of the hero to the teller's choices, the absolute control of the literary artist over his imagined world, and the supremacy of artistic imagination as a mode for apprehending reality. In addition, we shall also use the present discussion of *Transparent Things* as a bridge leading from one category to another, for our next chapter will be devoted to problems involved in memoiristic narration.

The Enigma

The "enigma" itself (i.e. "Who speaks?" in *Transparent Things*) is familiar today, more than a decade after the initial publication of the novel. Still, one may recall that when the book first came out it was the cause of some consternation among its critics. UPDIKE, usually one of VN's friendliest reviewers, announced straightway that he "[does] not understand Vladimir Nabokov's new novel" (1972, 211). Similarly DUFFY opened her otherwise favorable review with a surmise that "some day [VN] may succeed in writing a novel that is impossible to review" (1972, 61).[165]

It was probably as a reply to such public expressions of puzzlement that the author later undertook to point out some of the intricacies involved in his novel. One year after *Transparent Things* he included in a collection of his published interviews a

165. An ancient complaint. Similarly VARSHAVSKIJ began his review of *Glory: "Ochen' trudno pisat' o Sirine"* [*It is very difficult to write about Sirin]" (1933, 266).

peculiar companion-piece – an "interview" purportedly conducted by an anonymous correspondent and rejected by the magazine for which it was intended (cf. *SO*, 194–6). In this shadow-interview VN dwells at some length on what he calls "the structural knot of [*Transparent Things*]" (194), providing a reading that has since then been adopted in most discussions of the novel:

> [216] [Q:] *So who is that observer; who are those italicized 'we' in the fourteenth line of the novel; who, for goodness' sake, is the 'I' in its very first line?*
>
> [A:] The solution, my friend, is so simple that one is almost emabarrassed to furnish it. But here goes. An incidental but curiously active component of my novel is Mr. R., an American writer of German extraction. He writes English more correctly than he speaks it. In conversation R. has an annoying habit of introducing here and there the automatic 'you know' of the German émigré, and, more painfully yet, of misusing, garbling, or padding the commonest American cliché. A good specimen is his intrusive, though well meant, admonition in the last line of my last chapter: 'Easy, you know, does it, son'.
> (195)

While the author's solution may strike us as something of a small enigma in its own right, it still has the advantage of giving an answer to our first question.[166] Narrative voice in the novel belongs to the writer R – a rather peripheral figure within the narrated history – whom the principal hero actually comes across on the plane of his own reality (cf. Chapters Ten and Eighteen: 29–33, 68–71).

If this is accepted, some additional conditions become necessary. We should assume, first, that R has the habit of referring to his former self in third-person forms ("Mr. R. lived mostly in Switzerland" [24], "[. . .] as R. wrote in another connection" [35], and so forth).[167] Secondly, the numerous markers of N_E in the novel must be regarded as deliberate snares, designed to keep the reader from inducing the true status of the narrating agency.[168] From a strictly classificatory standpoint, we are still able to place

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166. Recent critics who have taken up aspects of narration in *Transparent Things* include MORTON 1974, 142–6; GRABES 1977, 96–105; DE JONGE 1979, 69–71; MADDOX 1983, 130–41. The most detailed discussions in this respect are those by ROWE (1979a, 175–82 plus 1981, 12–16), who uses the novel as a major test case for his thesis anent "Nabokov's spectral dimension" (1981, esp. 9–11). *Transparent Things* is indeed a "ghost story", precisely as Rowe maintains, but only superficial attention has so far been paid in criticism to the relationship between this feature and the principal thematic import in the narrative. The right direction has, to my mind, been indicated in a paper by JOHNSON, where *Transparent Things* is listed among other Nabokovian works giving expression to "the [. . .] theme [. . .] of death and the hereafter" (1981b, 544, 555–6); but in this case no consideration is afforded to narrative problematics. For other discussions of the novel, likewise avoiding the question of narratorship, cf. ALTER 1972; SLONIM 1973; KARLINSKY 1973; ROSENBLUM 1978. Rosenblum is particularly adept in calling attention to what he calls the "potential for design" (223) on the plot-level of the novel. The same problem will come up in the present discussion.

167. This again recalls a practice applied by many other Nabokovian N-agents. E.g. Smurov: "[. . .] Smurov belonged to the best St. Petersburg society" (*E*, 42). Or Van Veen: "Van immediately recognized Ardis Hall" (*A*, 35).

168. The effectiveness of the snare is seen in the fact that e.g. COUTURIER still describes *Transparent Things* as "one of those rare Nabokovian novels without a homodiegetic narrator [$=N_I$]" (1978, 167; 1979, 39). Similarly FREIWALD (1980/81, 114) suggests that the novel has "an extradiegetic narrator [$=N_E$]". Cf. also RAMPTON 1984, 171; LONG 1984, 69. These critics make no reference to VN's proposed solution in ex. [216].

Transparent Things among the author's other novels with an *intrinsic* teller, although its deceptive guise may first have led us astray (*Table 1* [1.2.5.]).

But as we know, the gist of the matter does not reside in mere technicalities. After all, "Mr. R." quite demonstrably *dies* long before the terminal point in the narrated history (cf. his last letter to his publisher in Chapter Twenty-One [82–4]), which means that the transmission of all events taking place after R's death (specifically: Chapters One to Three [1–8] and Twenty-Two to Twenty-Six [85–104]) becomes newly problematic. Can a deceased teller be classified as either "intrinsic" or "extrinsic"? Should our accepted criteria be applied at all in the case of N who has literally departed to the world "on the other side"?

In this way, the central enigma in *Transparent Things* is seen to concern not only a trivially typological problem, but rather the precise borderline between separate modes of being ("life" and "afterlife") in the fictive world. We have been told often enough, by logicians and discourse analysts alike, that any statement in the way of *I am dead* or *I do not exist* is impossible from a pragmatic point of view.[169] VN has himself taken up the matter through the medium of Vadim in *Look at the Harlequins!*, where he proposes "an old rule" – "so old and trite that [one] blushe[s] to mention it":

> [217] The I of the book
> cannot die in the book.
> (239)

He adds the self-parodic admonition: "I am speaking of serious novels, naturally" (*ibid*). As for *Transparent Things,* the narrative statement that it embodies is clearly "impossible". At the same time, the novel – whether serious or not – also manages to link the question of N-agent's status with its deepest thematic problematics. It is mainly with a view to this connection that I shall now approach the particular intricacies of narration in the work.

Narration in *Transparent Things*

The overriding tenor of the narrative is set immediately in the brief, one-page introductory chapter to the novel (1–2). A range of VN's most characteristically self-referential devices is put on display here. There occur e.g. insidious uses of the narratorial plural: "When *we* concentrate on a material object [. . .]" (the emphasis is in the text). N is made to openly "recruit" his hero in the first clauses: "Here's the person I want" – referring to "Hugh Person", the principal protagonist on the plane of the narrated action. Or he is made to introduce a duo of more incidental figures through a somewhat gross pun: "More in a moment" – referring to the subsequent appearances of Jack and Julia "Moore" (on 20 and 32 respectively). In addition, there are digressive excursuses on seemingly random topics ("[. . .] if the future existed [. . .]"), overt addresses to hypothetical readers ("[. . .] you are thinking, and quite rightly so [. . .]"), or – absurdly – salutes to the participants in the narrated action itself ("Hullo, person!").

Analogous demonstrations of N-agent's predominance over the hero are densely

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169. On the other hand, precisely such paradoxes are regularly exploited in contemporary fiction. Cf. e.g. RYAN 1981, 536–7; STANZEL 1982, 229–32. CHATMAN (1980) has tackled a famous example – Julio Cortâzar's *Blow-Up* (1967) – that might perhaps be collated with certain other aspects of VN's novel as well.

distributed throughout the remaining twenty-five chapters, suggesting a close affinity between *Transparent Things* and many of the author's most flagrantly parodistic and "anti-polyphonic" narratives. (Fittingly, it is pointed out by N in one instance that the term "character" refers not only to invented persons, but also to graphic signs on the page [92] – both are equally susceptible to choices made by the literary artist behind the text.)

Such instances can be further divided into two types of foregrounded ND:

(i) As in all other novels discussed so far, there are numerous passages in *Transparent Things* in which the presence of an extrinsic, manipulative voice is indicated. The overall situation of N resembles that of an omniscient, deity-like "author" familiar to us e.g. from the previous discussion of *Bend Sinister*.

(ii) And again there are less obvious instances through which the solution supplied by VN in ex. [216] may be verified: the ultimate source of ND in the novel is still the fictive novelist R, who has posthumously brought to a conclusion his last piece of writing.

The simultaneous existence of the two alternatives can be inferred by the reader from some apparently quite incongruous markers. These will be given a separate scrutiny.

Novelistic Omniscience

VN has always made extensive use in his novels of *cognitive gaps*. While C-agents are shown judging the fictive reality from their subjective viewpoints, these assessments are at the same time regarded ironically from the higher position of N, who finally emerges as the sole creator behind the real-seeming illusion.

Transparent Things develops still further the suggestion that it is the precise act of telling that brings with it a superior level of cognition. "There are no mysteries now" (22), as N announces at an early point of the novel. Elsewhere, this claim is punctuated through a consistent emphasis on the "transparency" of all narrated events (e.g. 1, 17, 32, 41, 44, 70, 93, 98, 101, 102, 104). In its most blatant form the same suggestion is seen in the concrete methods of narration chosen for the novel. Each of the following strategies is evolved into an outright parody of conventionally "omniscient" telling.

(i) *Overt Parodies.* The notion of omniscience itself is taken *ad absurdum* in those frequent instances where N is allowed to tell, literally, "everything" about a given topic. Consider e.g. the case of the pencil – "a very plain, round, technically faceless old pencil of cheap pine, dyed a dingy lilac" (6) – that Hugh Person discovers in his desk drawer in Chapter Three. Having once focused on the object, N is not content with a mere listing of its surface features, launching instead on a minute inquiry into its past history (6–8) – from the former owners and users of the implement to its original manufacture. Even the discovery of pencil lead is located in "Shakespeare's birth year" (7), and the fate of the wooden cover is traced back to its cutting from "the board [. . .] in the log [. . .] in the [. . .] forest in the world that Jack built" (7–8).[170]

A similar digression occurs in Chapter Six, where the inexperienced hero accosts a

170. Hermann in *Despair* is less thorough, placing the task of elaboration on the shoulders of his reader: "Please imagine what should follow here – the history of mirrors" (31).

prostitute for the first time in his life and is taken by her to "one of the better beds" (17) in a Swiss rooming house. What follows is not the story of Person's sexual initiation – expected by the reader – but rather the history of the room. It is disclosed that the episode takes place in the same quarters "where ninety-one, ninety-two, nearly ninety-three years ago a Russian novelist had sojourned on his way to Italy" (*ibid*). N further dwells at some length on the activities of the unnamed novelist, on his work in progress, or on his habit of frequenting casinos (17–18),[171] returning only after this wholly extraneous digression to the "present" of the narrative (with Person already leaving the prostitute's lodgings [18–19]).

Elsewhere in the novel, N may apply the notion of "transparency" in an eerily concrete sense by focusing on "such fascinating trifles as the shallow hollow in a pillow as seen through a person's forehead [. . .]" (102). Or he may take the narration straight to the realm of the grotesque, treating the reader to a clinical account of the hero's innards:[172]

> [218] A mess of sprouts and mashed potatoes, colorfully mixed with pinkish meat, could be discerned, if properly focused, performing hand-over-fist evolutions in Person's entrails, and one could also make out in that landscape of serpents and caves two or three apple seeds, humble travelers from an earlier meal.
> (101)

(ii) *Overt Cognitive Opposition.* In an analogous manner, the novel is consistent in its strategy of pitting N-agent's better-informed vision against the assessments deriving from the hero. The opposition is made overt at the opening of Chapter Three, as Person takes a first look at his hotel room. Sections marked with CD represent here the hero's conjectures, while ND indicates a corrective deriving from N.

> [219] In his search for a commode to store his belongings Hugh Person, a tidy man, noticed that the middle drawer of an old desk [. . .] had not been reinserted properly [CD] by the lodger or servant [ND] (actually neither) [CD] who had been the last to check if it was empty [ND] (nobody had).
> (6)

This occurs again at the conclusion of Chapter Twelve, during Person's visit to his future mother-in-law:

> [220] He was still rather simple as lovers go. One might have said to fat, vulgar Madame Chamar: how dare you exhibit your child to sensitive strangers? But our Person vaguely imagined that [CD] this was a case of modern immodesty in Madame Chamar's set. [ND] What 'set', good Lord? The lady's mother had been a country veterinary's daughter, same as Hugh's mother (by the only coincidence worth noting in the whole rather sad affair).
> (42)

And once again at the actual conclusion, just before Person perishes in the hotel fire. Even his ultimate misconjecture is carefully singled out in ND:

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171. Which might suggest Dostoevskij. In his afore-cited interview VN has himself identified the gambling novelist as "a minor Dostoevski" (*SO,* 195). Cf. also KARLINSKY (1973, 45) for a meticulous consideration of the literary-historical backgrounds of this passage.

172. This particular ploy has been anticipated by Kinbote in *Pale Fire:* "We see [. . .] [Gradus's] humid flesh. We can even make out [. . .] his magenta and mulberry insides, and the strange, not so good sea swell undulating in his entrails" (278).

> [221] [. . .] *one of his last wrong ideas* was that those were the shouts of people anxious to help him, and not the howls of fellow men.
> (104; my emphasis)

In a particularly revealing instance, the reader is challenged to test his own powers of perception against those of the hero, who remains obtuse to the end with regard to the coincidences limning his life. In the course of his first trip to Switzerland Person comes across a random display of items in a souvenir store:

> [222] Hugh examined the items [. . .]. He found rather fetching the green figurine of a female skier made of a substance he could not identify through the show glass (it was 'alabasterette', imitation aragonite, carved and colored in the Grumbel jail by a homosexual convict, rugged Armand Rave, who had strangled his boyfriend's incestuous sister).
> (13)

As in other Nabokovian narratives, the details supplied by N are made to correlate with many of the key-events occurring in the subsequent history.[173] The parenthetical digression on "Armand Rave" prefigures not only the emergence of the future Mrs. Person (i.e. "Armande", first mentioned on 25), or her fate at the hands of her husband (77–81), but also Person's own prison-term of more than eight years (96–8). Unlike his predecessor, Person will commit his deed while *asleep,* hence providing a purely verbal link between the two episodes (*rêve*/Rave: there are many other Franco-English puns in the text, e.g. 12, 14, 45, 46, 88, 95). In addition, it is told that during the episode of the actual strangling the Persons had as their neighbor a sculptor (72–3), which further enhances the motif of "carving".

The green figurine interlinks with the same complex of motifs, for Armande, too, will later appear with a pair of "weird-looking, reptile-green things" (51) – slalom skis – and a matching "glossy green nylon" (53). Before the hotel fire, at the end of Person's last visit to Switzerland, "a nicely wrapped box containing the green figurine of a girl skier" (100–1) appears in his room, but no indication is given that he has become aware of the symmetry.

(iii) *Bifurcation.* An additional strategy in the novel consists of laying bare the arbitrariness of all narrated action. It is pointed out, in other terms, that behind any actualized history there exist innumerable "possible but unfollowed narrative paths" that N has rejected in constructing his finished tale. (For a concise theoretical overview of "infinite bifurcation" in narrative literature cf. CHATMAN 1978, 55, 56–7.)

This is an ancient device in VN's fiction,[174] but in *Transparent Things* it is revived

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173. The "potential for design" in this passage has also been accurately noted in the paper by ROSENBLUM 1978, 223–6.

174. Emerging, in fact, long before the experimentations with bifurcating plot structure in works by such postmodernists as Borges, Calvino, or Fowles. So already Smurov discoursed in *The Eye* on the potentialities underlying narrative-making:

> There is titillating pleasure in looking back at the past and asking oneself, 'What would have happened if . . .' and substituting one chance occurrence for another, observing how, from a gray, barren, humdrum moment in one's life, there grows forth a marvellous rosy event that in reality had failed to flower. A mysterious thing, this branching structure of life: one senses in every past instant a parting of ways, a 'thus' and an 'otherwise', with innumerable dazzling zigzags bifurcating and trifurcating against the dark background of the past.
> (36–7)

In *Bend Sinister,* we recall, N offers for the reader two main variants of the Krug-Paduk

with a gusto that amounts to a veritable self-parody. It becomes constantly underlined that in retracing the hero's life N – unlike the former – might have chosen any other set of events, had he merely wished to do so:

> [223] Now we have to bring into focus the main street of Witt [. . .]. It teems with transparent people and processes, into which and through which we might sink with an angel's or author's delight, but we have to single out for this report only one Person.
> (44)

Detailing the guests staying at the Ascot Hotel during Person's last visit, N pays passing attention to "a Swiss businessman flipping through an ancient magazine (which had actually been left there by Hugh eight years ago, *but this line of life nobody followed up*)" (96; my emphasis) – the inbuilt suggestion being again that the line might well have been followed, had it been necessary for the development of the present narrative. Similarly, a single mention of Person's "aunt Melissa" immediately sets off the bifurcating mechanism, with only the self-imposed interruption preventing the passage from blooming forth into a full-fledged story:

> [224] She was a dear soul, with five cats, living in a toy house, at the end of a birch avenue, in the quietest part of –
> (45)

Compare also the afore-cited "pencil"-digression:

> [225] A knife and a brass sharpener have thoroughly worked upon [the pencil] and if it were necessary we could trace the complicated fate of the shavings [. . .] now reduced to atoms of dust whose wide, wide dispersal is panic catching its breath [. . .][175]
> (7)

The Posthumous Narrative

The emergence of Mr. R. as the controlling voice in *Transparent Things* is effected through a threefold set of markers: (i) a double sense given to seemingly straightforward narrative passages; (ii) a consistent emphasis on the motif of "the dead" throughout the novel; and (iii) a network of correlations built between the discourses uttered within the narrated history (CD) and N-agent's own discourse (ND).

(i) *Double Readings.* The first indication that more is involved in the narrative than a mere show of unchecked omniscience, appears already in Chapter One, where it is disguised as a narratorial reflection on the subject of "transparency":

> [226] When *we* concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things, through which the past shines!
> (1; emphasis in the text)

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colloquy to choose from (128–35); in *Despair* Hermann provides one of his chapters with three alternative openings (53–4); and in *Ada* altogether seven different endings are given for Part Four (531), implicating also seven different ways in which Van's and Ada's history might have been resumed.

175. Somewhat similarly N in *Pnin* speculates on the fate of a particle once removed from his eye: "I wonder where that speck is now? The dull, mad fact is that it *does* exist somewhere" (176; emphasis in the text).

In its larger context this is susceptible to two readings. We may read the excerpt, first, as a frank meditation on N-agent's own function, for we have just seen that the problem of selecting the narrative materials constitutes a central topic in the discourse. (Hence the reference to "skimm[ing] over matter" above.) Secondly, however, it is indicated that the italicized *we* has additional referents in the narrative. As the story proceeds, it transpires that not only Mr. R. but also a large group of other C-agents die off before the concluding episodes, in this way stepping quite literally beyond the material bounds of NW. When at the same time numerous segments of the discourse are so designed as to suggest a viewpoint belonging to the latter group as well, a rather bizarre sense comes to pervade the repeated assertions of omniscience. They can be concurrently ascribed to an auctorial N commenting on his craft, and to a host of posthumous figures reflecting on their new mode of existence. ("There are no mysteries *now*" [22; my emphasis]). Hence also the mention of "novices" in ex. [226] above.

This type of oscillation between two readings occurs e.g. in the ludicrous excursus on observing "the shallow hollow in a pillow" through the forehead of a sleeping person:

> [227] In the beginning of our always entrancing, sometimes terrifying, new being that kind of innocent curiosity [. . .] is not unusual, especially if a person and the shadows of related matter are being followed from youth to death.
> (102)

Or in the reflections on temporal levels:

> [228] Perhaps if the future existed, concretely and individually, as something that could be discerned by a better brain, the past would not be so seductive: its demands would be balanced by those of the future. Persons might then straddle the middle stretch of the seesaw when considering this or that object.
> (1)

"Straddl[ing]" between separate points in time is of course what N himself does when ordering the discourse (cf. his later comment on "tangled tenses" on 100) – hence again putting forth the suggestion that he is no longer a "person" (nor "Person": the punning implications of the hero's name are exploited all through the narrative).

Similarly, when N tells that "direct interference in a person's life does not enter [his] scope of activity" (92), this might apply equally well to the policy of objective, "impersonal" narration as to the policy of non-interference adopted by posthumous spirits with regard to the physical world:

> [229] The most we can do when steering a favorite in the best direction [. . .] is to act as a breath of wind and to apply the lightest, the most indirect pressure such as *trying* to induce a dream that we *hope* our favorite will regard as prophetic if a likely event does actually happen.
> (*ibid;* emphases in the text)

After ex. [229] N again returns to professional matters, commenting on the mechanical process of transforming the discourse into print:

> [230] On the printed page the words 'likely' and 'actually' should be italicized too, at least *slightly*, to indicate a *slight* breath of wind inclining those characters (in the sense of both signs and personae).
> (*ibid;* emphases as above)

In the concluding episode it is indicated that not simply the path leading to the hero's demise has been traced in the narrative. What is also described is the birth of N-agent's

own literary inspiration, resulting in the writing of the actual book:

> [231] This is, I believe *it:* not the crude anguish of physical death but the incomparable pangs of the mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another.
> (104; emphasis as above)

(ii) *The Dead.* The death-motif appears in the novel both as an element of the plot and as a source of stylistic figurations. The two functions come together in the metaphoric references to "ghosts" at various points in the narrative: "[. . .] a figure of speech, a specter of thought" (1); "It was not a ghost [. . .]" (19); "Who would care to haunt half-remembered lumps of matter [. . .]" (94). Or in the ghoulish pun: "Dust to dust [. . .] the dead are good mixers [. . .]" (93).

All but everyone dies in *Transparent Things.*[176] Among the first incidents reported in the novel there is Person Sr.'s death during the initial trip to Switzerland (12–15), and the narrative closes with Person perishing in a fire eighteen years later (100–4). In between, at least thirteen additional deaths of more or less peripheral C-agents are recorded: the former director of the Ascot Hotel (4); Mr. R.'s hired detective (32); the paramour of mother and daughter Moore (*ibid*); another of Julia Moore's anonymous lovers (35); Person's "Aunt Melissa" (45); Armande's father, "the late Charles Chamar" (63); her mother (68); Armande (81); Mr. R. (82–4); one of Person's fellow-patients in a mental hospital (93); "Jacques", one of Armande's Swiss companions (94); Julia Moore's "ailing old suitor Mr. (now Lord) X" (92) as well as Julia herself ("now Lady X" [97]).[177] Also the reference to "the girl in mourning" (13) in Chapter Five connects with the overall pattern, suggesting the incidence of still other, unrecorded deaths outside the actualized framework of the narrative.

(iii) *ND–CD Correlations.* "The dead", then, are granted a quite peculiar role in the narrative system of *Transparent Things,* for it is indicated that also the agency responsible for the telling belongs to their ranks. The most decisive signals carrying this suggestion are contained in a set of linkages between ND in the novel and segments of embedded discourse belonging to the plane of the narrated history. It is mainly by following such covert clues that we shall be able to associate the primary voice in the novel with that of Mr. R., the deceased novelist, whose minor part in the action initially caused us to overlook his importance.[178] As an additional twist, Person himself – in his capacity as a former copy editor – acquires the wholly paradoxical status of being both a reader of his maker's novels and an agent *within* his latest one. (Aptly enough, he is at one point designated in the text as "Our Person, our reader" [75].)

There exist, first, hidden coincidences between locutions assigned to R during his brief appearances in the history (CD) and locutions reoccurring in narration (ND). These are typified by R's greeting to Person at the outset of their first meeting in

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176. One reviewer of the novel quite accurately took up "Mr. Nabokov['s] [. . .] impatience to be rid of everyone" (GALLANT 1972, 12). Cf. also ALTER 1972, 72.

177. Notice that after her death Armande, too, is punningly denoted as "Lady X" (97).

178. For a discussion of these markers cf. also the two articles by ROWE 1979a, 175–82 and 1981, 12–16. On the other hand, his explanation that "[R's] ghost [. . .] intrude[s] upon the narration" only on selected occasions (1981, 14) would seem to presuppose still another, unidentified N. Cf. also 1979a, 177, 181.

Switzerland – "[CD] Hullo, Person!" (30) – and N-agent's address to the hero in the first paragraph of the book: "[ND] Hullo, Person!" (1). Other examples include: "You know" ([CD] 31, 69, 83; [ND] 104); "O.K." ([CD] 31; [ND] 92); "Son" ([CD] 31, 32, 69; [ND] 104).[179]

There are also stylistic correlations. When R defends to Person the title of his "*Tralatitions*" as "a perfectly respectable synonym of the word 'metaphor' " (69), the phrase later crops up in ND: "[. . .] on the other, tralatitiously speaking, hand [. . .]" (92). When N sprinkles his discourse with a profusion of italicized phrases (e.g. 1, 4, 7, 60, 63, 75, 76, 92, 97, 104), overtly laying bare his practice ("We depend on italics [. . .]" [92]), the mannerism will pervade R's own writing as well (cf. 75 and his last letter cited on 84).

Moreover, there are some instances of what may be regarded as a particular case of *intertextuality:* hidden correlations between the narrated reality and R's fictive novels embedded within the primary level of the narrative.[180] Explicit attention is drawn to such linkages in connection with Person's first call on the Chamar family: "As happens so often in R.'s fiction, 'nobody answered the bell' " (38; cf. also: "[. . .] as R. wrote in another connection [. . .]" [35]). More specific instances would involve e.g. the conflagration scene at the conclusion and R's own "*Figures in the Golden Window*" (25–6, 32, 38) – a novel within a novel that anticipates Person's fate through its very title (elsewhere garbled into "*The Burning Window*" [26]; cf.: "The window [. . .] broke into a torrent of rubies [. . .]" [103]); its "flame-and-soot" cover (25, 28); or its concrete plot-line: "June sets her new dollhouse on fire and the whole villa burns down" (26)[181] Similarly, when Person confers with Armande and Julia in Chapter Thirteen (45–8), the setting evokes a direct comparison with "R.'s famous novella *Three Tenses*" (46). Even weather conditions may be jokingly derived from R's fiction. Compare Chapter Twenty-Three: " 'Raining in Wittenberg, but not in Wittgenstein'. An obscure joke in *Tralatitions*" (91).

It is justified, in view of such constant play with narrative levels, that when Person finally joins the ranks of other deceased C-agents, he is himself afforded a vision of the "book" in which he has been participating without ever becoming aware of its maker:

> [232] Rings of blurred colors circled around him, reminding him briefly of a childhood picture in a frightening book about triumphant vegetables whirling faster and faster around a nightshirted boy trying desperately to awake from the iridescent dizziness of dream life.[182] Its ultimate vision was the incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent and hollow.
> (104)

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179. Cf. the author's own comment on "[R's] annoying habit of [. . .] missing, garbling, or padding the commonest American cliché" (above ex. [216]).

180. I am using the term in accordance with KRISTEVA 1970b. The section on "*Les livres dans le livre*" (146–8) is particularly pertinent to the question. Cf. also the chapter on *The Defense* for previous comments on the problem (above exs. [204]–[209]).

181. June, it is further indicated, is "the narrator's daughter" (26) in the fictive novel. R's real-life stepdaughter is named "Julia" (first mentioned on 26), which recalls – besides Shakespeare – a similarly punning series from "*Success*" by Sebastian Knight – another novel within a novel: "[. . .] Judy, Juliette, Augusta [. . .]" (*SK*, 93–4).

182. The hero's final delirium engenders an additional correlation within the novel. Cf. the previous

The possibility that a superior level of cognition ("omniscience") may lie just beyond the border of one's physical existence has always intrigued protagonists in VN's fiction. "Some day we must all die, and then we shall know everything" (*TD,* 67), as the hero in "Music" constricts this notion. "What a mess life has been. Now I know everything" (187), muses also Albinus at the instance of his death in *Laughter in the Dark.* The same conception is elaborated further by Sebastian Knight in one of his fictive meditations in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:*

> [233] The answer to all questions of life and death, 'the absolute solution' was written all over the world [. . .]. Thus the traveller spells the landscape and its sense is disclosed, and likewise, the intricate pattern of human life turns out to be monogrammatic, now quite clear to the inner eye disentangling the intervowen letters. And the word, the meaning of which appears is astonishing in its simplicity: the greatest surprise being perhaps that in the course of one's earthly existence, with one's brain encompassed by an iron ring,[183] by the close-fitting dream of one's own personality – one had not made by chance that simple mental jerk, which would have set free imprisoned thought and granted it the great understanding.
> (167–8)

Or in dying Chernyshevski's final monologue, as it is reconstructed by Fyodor in *The Gift:*

> [234] For our stay-at-home senses the most accessible image of our future comprehension of those surroundings which are due to be revealed to us with the disintegration of the body is the liberation of the soul from the eyesockets of the flesh and our transformation into one complete and free eye.
> (224)

Consider also Krug in *Bend Sinister:*

> [235] Death is either the instantaneous gaining of perfect knowledge (similar to the instantaneous disintegration of stone and ivy composing the circular dungeon where formerly the prisoner had to content himself with only two small apertures optically fusing into one; whilst now, with the disappearance of all walls, he can survey the entire circular landscape), or absolute nothingness, *nichto.*
> (155–6)

Or the following exchange from the early, untranslated verse-drama *Smert'* ("Death"):

> [236] EDMOND
> *Govoril ty,*
> *chto nasha smert' –*
> GONVIL
> *– byt' mozhet udivlenie*
> *byt' mozhet nichego.*
> [*E: You said/that our death –/G: – may be a miracle/or it may be a mere nothingness.]
> (Act I; 13)

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discourse on life and death in Chapter Twenty-Four:

> Human life can be compared to a person dancing in a variety of forms around his own self: thus the vegetables of our first picture book encircled a boy in his dream [. . .] gradually forming a transparent ring of banded colors around a dead person or a planet.
> (92–3)

183. Our final example of the "circle"-motif. Cf. above notes 78–9, 132, 136. Notice also ex. [235] below.

Transparent Things derives its import from a cunning combination of such musings with a definitely anomalous narrative structure. The primary voice in the narrative is assigned to a figure who is – and at the same time is not – a part of the reality reconstructed in his discourse. If we read the work only as a somewhat comically thorough application of novelistic omniscience (above exs. [218]–[225]), we are bound to miss the thematic sense hidden in its system. But this happens also if we go straight to the "solution" (on the basis of exs. [226]–[232]), identifying R as the teller, while paying no heed to the auctorial privilege that he has been given.

It is, we should recall, "with an angel's *and* author's delight" (above ex. [223]; my emphasis) that N in *Transparent Things* goes about his narrative task. By bringing together the two modes of cognitive superiority within a single text VN has once more returned to his most basic thematic concerns – for through its bizarre structure the novel keeps suggesting that the truth sought after by the author's protagonists has already been discovered by their maker. "The mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another" (above ex. [231]) that awaits Hugh Person at the end of his existence is required from any "person" who will assume control over an imaginative world of his own making.[184]

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184. Cf. here the lines written by R to his publisher just before his demise:

> If one could explain [the mystery of death] in one big book, that book would become no doubt a new bible and its author the founder of a new creed. Fortunately for my self-esteem that book will never be written – not merely because a dying man cannot write books, but because that particular one would never express in one flash what can only be understood *immediately*.
> (84; R's emphasis)

The latter phrase is taken straight out of VN's own theorizings on the properties of literary structure (Introduction [0.4.]). Cf. e.g. his key comments from *Speak, Memory* on "[the] instantaneous and transparent organism of events, of which the poet [. . .] is the nucleus" (218).

3

THE CATEGORY OF N_I: N AND EMBEDDED NARRATIVES

3.1. *Narrative Situation: Spatio-Temporal Shifts and NS*

3.1.1. NS and the Mnemonic Bond

An examination of the second main category of N in Nabokovian fiction entails a new look into the relationship between the narrating agent and the world evoked in his discourse. For when in our first group of texts (N_E-texts) the teller was always seen to emerge as a full-fledged "author" in relation to his invented world (as in *Bend Sinister, The Defense,* or *The Gift*), in the second instance the bond is in effect *mnemonic:* the teller "remembers" an authentic past that he has himself once experienced. In other words, we may say that N_I tells of a world *in which his own presence as C is an established narrative fact.* (That the two alternatives may also be parodically brought together was observed in the foregoing discussion of *Transparent Things* [2.4.].)

The overall concern with the notions of "past" and "memory" in VN's writing is well known.[1] In one form or another it pervades the great majority of his fictional narratives – from early texts like *Mary,* "A Letter That Never Reached Russia", "The Return of Chorb", "The Admiralty Spire", or "Music", each of them dealing with reminiscences of a past romance, to the late masterpieces: *Lolita, Pale Fire,* and *Ada,* cast as memoiristic accounts of an entire life. Some of the author's first lyric poems (in *Stikhi* 1916) were devoted to his personal recollections (*"Ty pomnish' etot den'*? [. . .]" [15], *"Ty pomnish', kak v parke* [. . .]" [30], *"Ja pomnju, chto byli tomitel'no sladki*" [33], etc.), and the concern reverberates throughout a large portion of his mature

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1. We recall that the 1934 survey of VN's Russian fiction by KANTOR was entitled *"Bremja pamjati"* (i.e. "The Burden of Memory"). Four decades later MOYNAHAN was to characterize the author as "the great American artist of preterism" (1971, 5). For other accounts of the role allotted to "nostalgia", "childhood" or "time" in VN's writing see FIELD 1967, 45–9 *passim;* ZELLER 1974; TOBIN 1978. For some rather good comparisons with Proust cf. LOURIA 1974 and RIVERS 1977. VN himself had the habit of denying any directly Proustian influence on his writing. The question came up as early as 1930 in an interview conducted by the émigré magazine *Chisla* (Interview 1930; cf. VN's rather evasive reply on 274: *"Literaturnoe vlijanie – temnaja i smutnaja veshch'* [*Literary influence is a dark and obscure matter]"). On the other hand, he never made secret his thorough knowledge of the Proustian opus. In *Lectures 1* (207–49) a forty-page section is devoted to a dissection of novelistic techniques in *Remembrance of Things Past,* and the same techniques are frequently parodied – rather than simply borrowed – in the author's own novels. Compare also: "My sense of places is Nabokovian rather than Proustian" (*SO,* 197) and below n. 32.

verse (much of it dealing with the themes of exile and nostalgia: for a late sample cf. "From the Gray North" [*PP,* 149]). An evident culmination of this memory-consciousness occurs in *Speak, Memory,* which may be regarded both as a straightforward memoir and as a veritable repository of those same devices that are elsewhere allotted by the author to his fictive speakers.[2]

On the other hand, I would maintain that the concern may be less interesting as such than as a motivating device for certain types of narrative play. Indeed, VN has himself warned against abstracting from his works any separate "doctrine" or "theory" of time. In a somewhat gruff reply to a critic, he once pointed out that his preoccupation with temporal problematics is "all a structural trick" (*SO,* 289), with no significance outside the compositional design of a given novel.[3] What interests the author – and what interests us here – is the actual shape given to time in his fiction. How does time function as a specifically narrative element? How does an intrinsic teller go about reconstructing the story of his past? What are his intentions in undertaking the act of telling? And how do these intentions coincide with the resultant discourse? These are some of the questions that we shall be asking when we refer to the "situation" of the memoiristic N, or to the *narrative situation* (NS), in Nabokovian narration.[4]

I shall attempt to clarify this concept in the first part of my discussion.

3.1.2. A Survey of NS-Markers

3.1.2.1. On Embedding

> [1] [. . .] it is clear [. . .] that while a man is writing he is situated in some definite place; he is not simply a kind of spirit, hovering over the page. While he muses and writes, there is something or other going on around him: there is, for instance, this wind, this whirl of dust on the road which I see from my window [. . .]
> (*Ds,* 53)

This is a statement assigned to Hermann Karlovich, perhaps the most acutely self-conscious and self-parodic of all fictive memoirists employed in VN's novels. Immediately in the next sentence Hermann goes on to lampoon his foregoing discourse as a mere "trick of the trade, a poor thing worn to shreds by literary fiction-mongers" (*ibid*), further admitting that the circumstances evoked in ex. [1] may in fact be "as fictitious as all the rest" (*ibid*). Such parodic provisos notwithstanding, the cited passage is useful in defining an inbuilt property of all narratives observing the memoiristic mode: they always presuppose a spatio-temporal *frame* of some kind, a concrete set of circumstances,

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2. On a lesser scale, this concern becomes manifest even in VN's scholarly writings, where objective analysis may at any point give way to personal reminiscing. Compare e.g. the extraordinary gloss on "rainbows/*rádugi*" in the author's note to One: XXVII: 1. 9 of *Evgenij Onegin:* "My own sixty-year-old remembrance is not so much of prismatic colors cast upon snowdrifts by the two lateral lanterns of a brougham as of iridescent spicules around blurry street lights coming through its frost-foliated windows and breaking along the rim of the glass" (*EO* 2, 110).

3. The reprimand is addressed to LEONARD (cf. his article "In Place of Lost Time" [1970]).

4. Literary theorists have also designated the same property of narrative structure as "epic situation" (ROMBERG 1962, 33–4) or as "narrative instance" (GENETTE 1972, 212; BROOKE-ROSE 1977, 528). I follow DOLEŽEL (1973a, 63) and BAL (1981a, 45–7) in my terminological usage.

inside which the narrated history is contained. These circumstances may be overtly specified (as in ex. [1]), or they may remain indeterminate, but in the case of any properly intrinsic N they are still taken to be a part of the overall narrative setting. With auctorial narration, on the other hand, it is more as an exception to a commonly accepted rule that the extrinsic situation of N becomes concretized in his discourse – the teller remains, as Hermann puts it, "a [. . .] spirit, hovering over the page".[5]

As for the term *embedding,* it refers here not only to the simple fact that any history is "contained" within its frame, but also to a more consequential property. Unlike their auctorial counterparts, namely, memoiristic N-agents inhabit *two levels* in the narrative text – one which we have designated above as NS, and another one altogether, equating the reality-plane (NW-plane) of the narrated history itself. When we say that the first level is the one embedding the second, we are talking of a typically hierarchic relationship. In a memoiristic narrative the primary function of N is always fulfilled by the teller's present "narrating self", whereas his former self (his "perceiving self") assumes the function of C whose perceptions remain subordinated to the narration. It is this double agency of the narratorial figure that constitutes the central problem to be studied when we now approach the structure of intrinsic narration in our corpus. (We may recall that the distinction between N-agent's two "selves" was made as early as 1922 by Spitzer in his remarks on *Remembrance of Things Past;* for other discussions cf. GENETTE 1972, esp. 214, 227–31, 252–4; COHN 1978, 145–51; STANZEL 1982, 212, 270–1. For my earlier comments on hierarchic ordering in narratives see above 1.1.1.)

Below, it will be suggested that while in a conventional novel the reader's attention may be directed solely to occurrences taking place on the level of the embedded history, in VN's memoiristic narration the true dynamics of the text resides precisely *in the interplay between the history and the higher level on which the history is being reconstructed.* We might borrow once more the Genettean view, well put with regard to Proust's narrative technique: in VN's fiction it is more often than not the primary, embedding level of NS where "the drama's excitement is" (1972, 213).[6] The following are the most frequently-encountered markers of this compositional interplay.

3.1.2.2. Markers

Present-Tense Reference and Deictic Elements

A shift from one narrative level to another may be marked by certain readily discernible signs: changes in personal and tense forms, alternation of deictic elements, or other fluctuations of temporal and spatial reference. (For overviews of such techniques in fiction cf. also BROOKE-ROSE 1977, 528–31; BRONZWAER 1978, 3–6 *passim;* BAL 1981a, 43–7; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 89–91. On shifting between past- and present-tense forms in Proust cf. COHN 1978, 147–51.)

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5. In our studied corpus, the most flagrant deviation from this rule is exemplified by the conclusion of *Bend Sinister,* where the auctorial teller dismisses his fictive cast altogether, making his own real-life circumstances the primary object of the discourse. Above 2.2.3.

6. This, it would seem, was where the first critics of *Lolita* erred so dismally: they read the work only as a story of Humbert Humbert's illicit liaison, with no regard for the role given to his memoiristic, narrating, "self" in the total conception of the novel.

(i) *Uses of the Present Tense.* Evidently, any reference to "the present" as distinct from the narrated "past" may serve to remind us of N-agent's own situation behind the memoiristic discourse. The central opposition in these instances is always between a temporally distanced "world" (in the sense of NW) and the particular moment when an aspect of the past is evoked by N. The following is a rather characteristic example from *Speak, Memory* (which we shall here be treating on a par with the author's other memoiristic narratives):

> [2] [NW] As she was being tucked up again in the sleigh, I watched the vapor exhaled by all, horse included. I watched, too, the familiar pouting movement she made to distend the network of her close-fitting veil drawn too tight over her face, [NS] and as I write this, the touch of reticulated tenderness that my lips used to feel when I kissed her veiled cheek comes back to me – *flies* back to me with a shout of joy out of the snow-blue, blue-windowed (the curtains are not yet drawn) past.
> (38; emphasis in the text)

Similarly, any reference to the concrete problems of narrative-making are effective in bringing about the opposition. It can be noticed that VN's memoiristic tellers are quite as active in foregrounding their narrative function as their auctorial counterparts (above 2.2.):

> [3] [NW] Around that time [. . .] a real romantic adventure did come my way. [NS] I am now going to do something quite difficult, a kind of double somersault with a Welsh waggle (old acrobats will know what I mean), and I want complete silence, please.
> (*SM*, 204)
>
> [4] [NS] I want my learned readers to participate in the scene I am going to replay: I want them to examine its every detail and see for themselves how careful, how chaste, the whole wine-sweet scene is [. . .]. So let us get started. I have a difficult job before me.
> (*L*, 58)

And this is true also of references to any relics from the past that the teller may be using to prompt his memory:

> [5] I have before me the sheet of paper upon which, that night in Paris, I drew the diagram of the problem's position.
> (*SM*, 293)
>
> [6] Exhibit number two is a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with the golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left-hand corner. I speak of this neat product of Blank Blank Co, Blankton, Mass. as if it were really before me [. . .]
> (*L*, 41)
>
> [7] [. . .] my friend's masterpiece (the neatly stacked batches of which, as I write this, lie in the sun on my table as so many ingots of fabulous metal) [. . .]
> (*PF*, 101)
>
> [8] [. . .] as I look at the portrait Roy Carswell painted I seem to see a slight twinkle in Sebastian's eyes [. . .]
> (*SK*, 111)

Such intrusions of N-agent's present into the narration constitute a standard feature in all Nabokovian telling, and no extensive documentation is necessary here. Noticeably, the same opposition is actualized also in those rare instances where the narrated events are set in "the future" – taking place, in effect, only *after* their telling on the level of NS (a theoretical possibility mentioned by GENETTE 1972, 219–20; on "predictive" narration cf. also BAL 1981a, 47; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 90). An example is seen

in "Lance", where N – in a flagrant parody of conventional science fiction – recounts a fabulous space journey conducted not by himself but rather by "[his] more or less remote descendant" (163). Also here the main contrast in the narrative remains between N-agent's own present and the separate time-locus of the narrated reality. The narrative-theoretical issue would seem to be recognized by N himself when he takes up quite overtly his manner of substituting "the future" for the more conventional "past":

> [9] [. . .] if one is perfectly honest with oneself, there is nothing extraordinary in the tendency to give to the manners and clothes of a distant day (which happens to be placed in the future) an old-fashioned tinge, a badly pressed, badly groomed, dusty something, since the terms 'out of date', 'not of our age', and so on are in the long run the only ones in which we are able to imagine and express a strangeness no amount of research can foresee. The future is but the obsolete in reverse.[7]
> (*ND*, 165)

(ii) *Uses of Deictic Elements.* In an analogous manner, deictic adverbs of time (*now, today*) or place (*here*) may be used as a vehicle for accentuating the distance between N-agent's two selves. In *Speak, Memory* an all but tangible sense of a temporal flow is transmitted through the systematic play with deictic reference. Compare e.g. the deft juxtaposition of temporal and spatial terms in the following discourse on Vyra, the author's lost childhood home in Russia:

> [10] Looking down that avenue [at Vyra] from the base of the T near the drive one could make out quite distinctly the bright little gap five hundred yards away – *or fifty years away from where I am now.*
> (41; my emphasis)

There are similarly abrupt references to the memoirist's loss of youth:

> [11] I can feel upon my skin and in my nostrils the delicious country roughness of the northern spring day [. . .]. I see so plainly the three young men (the sum of their years equals *my present age*) [. . .]
> (62; my emphasis)

His loss of former physical prowess:

> [12] I had no special affection for the thing [. . .], but the fire of adolescent *amour propre* prompted me to do what I cannot imagine *my present self* ever doing.
> (243; my emphasis)

Or his loss of an entire home country, the cultural milieu of his youth:

> [13] I wonder, by the way, what would happen if I put in a long-distance call [to his former St. Petersburg number] from my desk *right now*? No answer? No such number? No such country?
> (235; my emphasis)

In the author's novels, by contrast, temporal adverbs are often used to emphasize a

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7. I find no justification in the text for the claim by FOWLER that "the protagonist in [. . .] 'Lance' is mad and fantasizes a space voyage" (1974, 172). We notice that whenever the Nabokovian narrative starts assuming more idiosyncratic forms, at least some critics attempt to find an easy way out by pronouncing the teller "mad". So e.g. ALBRIGHT talks of "the mad narrator [in *Transparent Things*]" (1981, 61), and STEGNER writes that V in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* "may be not only unreliable, but a little mad as well" (1966, 71).

distinct *gain* in N-agent's awareness as compared to that of his past self.[8] This is a staple device in such mystery-story parodies as *Lolita, Pale Fire,* or *Despair,* where the memoirist's former obtuseness is among the principal concerns of the narrative. The emphases in each case are N-agent's own:

> [14] All this [. . .] sped through my mind, just at the time I was sitting with those letters in my lap, but then it was one thing, now another; *now* I would slightly amend the statement.
> (*Ds,* 132)
>
> [15] Not only did I understand *then* that Shade regularly read to Sybil cumulative parts of his poem but it also dawns upon me *now* that, just as regularly, she made him tone down or remove from his Fair Copy everything connected with the magnificent Zemban theme.
> (*PF,* 91)
>
> [16] I now warn the reader not to mock me and my mental daze. It is easy for him and me to decipher *now* a past destiny [. . .]
> (*L*, 206)

Elsewhere in *Lolita,* bare emphatic "intonations" may be similarly used to signal a shift to the level of NS. The suggestion underlying such passages would seem to be that it is only at the instant of writing down the discourse that Humbert Humbert becomes fully cognizant of Lolita's past deceptions:

> [17] There was a very special rehearsal . . . my heart, my heart . . . there was one day in May marked by a lot of gay flurry.
> (198)
>
> [18] I added, to change the conversation – to change the direction of fate, oh God, oh God: 'Vivian is quite a woman [. . .]'
> (217)
>
> [19] Lo arrested the mouthful of water she had just taken, and put down her dancing glass.
> 'Course not', she said with a splutter of mirth. 'I meant the writer fellow in the Dromes ad'.
> Oh Fame! Oh Femina! [9]
> (120)

Memory References

> [20] We met her, *I remember,* near a pharmacy at the corner of Potsdammerstrasse and Privatstrasse.
> (*SM,* 161–2; my emphasis)

This is clearly a particular case of the former group (i.e. present-tense reference to NS).[10]

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8. For a similar opposition in Proust between "a benighted past self" and "a sovereignly cognizant narrator" cf. COHN 1978, 147. In "Lance", again, the standard situation is appropriately reversed (above ex. [9]). Because the history comes after its narrating the hero must be better-informed than his maker: "Emery Lancelot Boke, at twenty-one, knows immeasurably more than I, who am fifty and terrified" (*ND,* 163).

9. I read the latter phrase as deriving from the "narrating" rather than the "perceiving" Humbert. In the screenplay-version of *Lolita,* on the other hand, the same exclamation is incorporated into the dialogue between Humbert and Lolita (*L* S, 120), in which case the ironic contrast is immediately lost.

10. Cf. also the comment by BROOKE-ROSE on related passages in James's *The Turn of the Screw:* "The very first words *I remember* [in the governess's narrative] place the narrator firmly in the narrator's writing time" (1977, 528).

But in Nabokovian writing the overall frequency of references to "remembering" turns out to be so vast as to deserve a separate mention. (In *Speak, Memory* alone, the number of overt references easily extends to one hundred, which is the point where numerical calculations ought to be stopped.)

The scope for metaphoric variation is practically unlimited:

> [21] A big cretonne-covered divan, white with black trefoils, in one of the drawing rooms at Vyra rises in my mind, like some massive product of a geological upheaval before the beginning of history.
> (*SM*, 23)
>
> [22] The edition I had [. . .] remains in the stacks of my memory as a puffy book bound in red cloth [. . .]
> (*ibid*, 195)
>
> [23] [. . .] the images of those tutors appear within memory's luminous disc as so many magic-lantern projections.
> (*ibid*, 154)
>
> [24] A bewildering sequence of English nurses and governesses, some of them wringing their hands, others smiling at me enigmatically, come out to meet me as I re-enter my past.
> (*ibid*, 86)
>
> [25] With a sharp and merry blast from the whistle that was part of my first sailor suit, my childhood calls me back into that distant past to have me shake hands again with my delightful teacher.
> (*ibid*, 28)
>
> [26] *'In den Zelten achtzehn A'* – the address comes back to me dancing trochaically, immediately followed by the whispery motion of the cream-colored electric taxi that took us there.
> (*ibid*, 204)
>
> [27] The days of my youth, as I look back on them, seem to fly away from me in a flurry of pale repetitive scraps like those morning snowstorms of used tissue paper that a train passenger sees whirling in the wake of the observation car.
> (*L*, 17)
>
> [28] Through the darkness and the tender trees we could see the arabesques of lighted windows which, touched up by the colored inks of sensitive memory, appear to me now like playing cards – presumably because a bridge game was keeping the enemy busy.
> (*ibid*, 16)
>
> [29] I notice I have somehow mixed up two events [. . .], but such suffusions of swimming colors are not to be disdained by the artist in recollection.
> (*ibid*, 256)
>
> [30] The summer I spent there is a mere smudge of color on the dull glass of my mind.[11]
> (*LH!*, 75)

On the other hand, indirect references to N-agent's memoiristic efforts may be planted

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11. Apropos of exs. [28]–[30]. It is a common practice in memoiristic narratives to describe past events specifically in terms of light and color. In the first volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* the Proustian teller likens his recollection of Combray to "the colorless reflection in which are blended the uncapturable whirling medley of radiant hues" (PROUST 1913, 60). The image is comparable to that used by VN in the "Colette" section of his own memoir:

> I still seem to be holding that wisp of iridescence, not knowing exactly where to fit it, while she runs with her hoop ever faster around me and finally dissolves among the slender shadows cast on the gravelled path by the interlaced arches of its low looped fence.
> (*SM*, 152)

also *inside* the embedded history. Typical instances occur when Humbert Humbert tells that he had published a scholarly paper dealing with "The Proustian theme" (*L*, 18) already in his early youth, or that after the affair with Lolita he brought out an essay entitled "Mimir and Memory" (254) – hence anticipating, as it were, his subsequent efforts as a memoirist on the embedding level of the narrative.[12] Memory is indirectly evoked also in Humbert's addresses to "Mnemosyne", the ancient goddess of memory (*L*, 254, 255), and in Foreword to *Speak, Memory* VN explains that he had first planned to use the title "*Speak, Mnemosyne*" for his personal memoir as well (11). The mythical allusion resurfaces under a metaphoric guise inside the actual history of *Speak, Memory*. Recalling the entomological trips of his youth the author mentions that as a boy of thirteen he once captured a rare variety of "Parnassian" butterflies: according to him, they were "of ancient lineage, with rustling, glazed, semitransparent wings and catkin-like flossy abdomens [. . .] *Parnassius mnemosyne*, to be exact" (210).

In addition, we should consider the following instance from the memoir, exemplifying a paradoxical situation that we shall yet meet several times in the author's novels (below 3.2.). In Chapter Eleven (*SM*, 215–27), the history of VN's "first poem" is recounted. Dwelling at some length on this juvenile composition, VN details its autobiographic background, its literary sources, and technical peculiarities. What is remarkable, however, is that in the course of his account the author also manages to insert a reference to his memoiristic enterprise directly *into* the embedded text of which he is telling. What ultimately becomes described is not merely the ancient poem, but in effect a much more involuted exercise: *an effort by the memoirist to remember his younger self in the very act of writing about these efforts.*[13]

> [31] It was indeed a miserable concoction, containing many borrowings besides its pseudo-Pushkinian modulations. An echo of Tyutchev's thunder and a refracted sunbeam from Fet were alone excusable. For the rest, I vaguely remember the mention of 'memory's sting' – *vospominan'ya zhalo* [. . .]
> (224–5)

Individuation of NS

When the above markers are elaborated still further, NS ceases to be a mere "now", identified mainly by its opposition to the past history. Instead, the real-life situation of the memoiristic N starts assuming a range of individuating characteristics in its own right. In principle, the standard setting of "a narrator sitting at his writing-desk" (ROMBERG 1962, 35) may be expanded at any length in VN's fiction, until in the end the concrete circumstances of the narrative act begin vying for the reader's interest with the narrated action itself.[14] Some typical examples:

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12. BAL (1981a, 54) comments on related examples from *Wuthering Heights* and *1001 Nights*. In the latter text e.g. a reference to the rising sun in one of the embedded tales may serve to remind us of Scheherazade's own perilous situation at the moment when she utters the narrative.

13. This is the best example that I know of for rebutting the one-sided view of NS as merely enhancing the "illusion of reality" in a given narrative (a view stated e.g. by ROMBERG 1962, 33). In VN's texts the reverse effect (an illusion of a-realism) is always possible.

14. The technique is observed in many – but not all – of the author's N_I-texts. In *The Eye*, purportedly narrated by Smurov only *after* his suicide, the camouflaging of the authentic NS

[32] In this our dry report of Van Veen's early, too early love, for Ada Veen, there is neither reason, nor room for metaphysical digression. Yet, let it be observed (just while the lucifers fly and throb, and an owl hoots – also most rhythmically – in the nearby park) that Van [. . .] even then, at fourteen, recognized [. . .]
(*A*, 73)

[33] When he grew too loud, she shushed, shushingly breathing into his mouth, and now her four limbs were frankly around him as if she had been love-making for years in all our dreams – but impatient young passion (brimming like Van's overflowing bath while he is reworking this, a crotchety gray old wordman on the edge of a hotel bed) did not survive the first few blind thrusts.
(*ibid*, 121)

[34] For the sake of the scholars who will read *this* forbidden memoir with a secret tingle (they are human) [. . .] its author must add in the margin of galley proofs which a bedridden old man heroically corrects (for those slippery long snakes add the last touch to a writer's woes) [. . .]
(*ibid*, 220; Van Veen's emphasis)

[35] Humbert Humbert sweating in the fierce white light, and howled at, and trodden upon by sweating policemen, is now ready to make a further 'statement' (*quel mot!*) as he turns his conscience inside out and rips off its innermost lining.
(*L*, 71)

The conventional "writing-desk" situation is humorously evoked e.g. when Kinbote advises his reader in *Pale Fire* to purchase two copies of the book –

[36] [. . .] which can then be placed in adjacent positions on a comfortable table – not like the shaky little affair on which my typewriter is precariously enthroned now, in this wretched motor lodge, with that carrousel inside and outside my head [. . .]
(28)

Or in *Despair:*

[37] One moment. I was copying that letter and now it has vanished somewhere.
I can continue; it had slipped under the table.
(71)

It is the latter type of reference, marking a quite definite spatial and temporal locus, that makes possible the further modes of play with NS in the author's writing. These devices will next be looked into in more detail.

3.1.3. Spatio-Temporal Shifts as a Structural Principle: NS in *Speak, Memory* and *Ada*

As readers of fiction we are accustomed to observing those devices that may be used in ordering the narrative plot: flashbacks and anticipations, summaries and pauses, omissions of entire temporal blocks, or other techniques bearing on the element of time

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is part of the teller's own narrative strategy. Compare e.g.: "[. . .] if one can speak *here* of time at all [. . .]" (29; my emphasis). We have seen the same strategy resurfacing in *Transparent Things*, where the posthumous teller disguises his status under a deceptively auctorial stance (2.4.). Other instances are exemplified by many of VN's short stories: "A Slice of Life", "The Visit to the Museum", "Spring in Fialta", "The Vane Sisters", etc. These texts have only a marginal interest with regard to our present problem.

as it is manifested on the level of the embedded history.[15] It is less often that we pay attention to the temporal dynamics determining the actual telling of the history. (This is evidently because there is seldom any need for such attention: as GENETTE points out, in the immense majority of novels "the fictive narrating [. . .] is considered to have no duration" [1972, 222]. Cf. also RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 90.)

On the other hand, there is no reason why time *couldn't* be made a significant factor on the embedding level of NS.[16] This has been demonstrated most tangibly in a famous passage from *Tristram Shandy,* where the Sternean memoirist suddenly realizes that the duration of his story-telling act is in fact much longer than the time covered in the story. Hence Tristram will never reach the end of his memoir: "[. . .] the more I write, the more I shall have to write – and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. [. . .] Will this be good for your worships' eyes?" (STERNE 1759–67, 286). Such Sternean play may be found also in VN's writings (e.g. in a passage from *Speak, Memory,* where the author tells that it has taken him two hours to produce "the massacrous revisions and rewritings" of the very lines in which "a two-minute run" of his father's handwriting is described [178]). But as we shall presently see there are also other means available to the author for flaunting the teller's time as a part of the overall narrative presentation.

Local Shifts

A somewhat obvious, if still symptomatic example of the time-element in action is seen in a technique used by VN in his memoir: the retrieval of a forgotten detail only *at the precise instant when the discourse is being written.* What becomes repeatedly foregrounded in such passages is a specific *process* taking place on NS-level. One may talk here of a concrete shift from the point in time when a detail is not remembered to the moment when it is retrieved by the memoirist, constantly on the lookout for new revelations about the past that he is in the act of reconstructing.

We find one example from Chapter Seven of *Speak, Memory,* printed also as a separate story in a collection of the author's short fiction (i.e. "First Love" [*ND,* 43–51]; quotations are from the memoir). Having chosen as his topic the history of his "first love", occurring at Biarritz in 1909, the author lists a whole number of unforgettable details, only one of which escapes a full-scale restoration in his discourse:

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15. Russian Formalists used to study this question under the heading of *sjuzhetoslozhenie* – i.e. plot-composition (e.g. SHKLOVSKIJ 1919a and b). Aspects of the problem, variously termed, have been treated in Nabokov scholarship as "simultaneity" (FLEISCHAUER 1971), "superimposition" (ROWE 1976b), or "narrative transitions" (LANYI 1977). In the following I shall be mainly interested in the relationship between *narrative levels* – questions concerning plot-composition are taken up only insofar as they throw light on this particular problem.

16. In one of the few theoretical studies I have seen devoting attention to the problem, MENDILOW comments usefully on what he calls "the time-locus of the pseudo-author" (1952, 89–93 *passim*). Cf. also the distinction developed between the duration of the "story" and the duration of the "story-telling act" in a paper by DOLEŽEL 1973b, 92, 93–4. I shall be availing myself of this overall scheme.

[38] The dog [belonging to VN's nine-year-old playmate] was a female terrier with bells on her collar and a most waggly behind. From sheer exuberance, she would lap up salt water out of Colette's toy pail. I remember the sail, the sunset and the lighthouse pictured on that pail, but I cannot recall the dog's name, and this bothers me.
(150)

Further on, he proceeds to enumerate other incidents dating back to the immemorial summer – fistfights, a thwarthed attempt to elope with Colette, or the purchasing of souvenirs, among these a penholder with a tiny picture of the Biarritz *plage* (150–1) – after which it is announced that certain developments have also been occurring on the primary level of the memoirist:

[39] And now a delightful thing happens. The process of recreating that penholder and the microcosm of its eyelet stimulates my memory to a last effort. I try again to recall the name of Colette's dog – and, triumphantly, along those remote beaches, over the glossy evening sands of the past, where each footprint slowly fills up with sunset water, here it comes, here it comes, echoing and vibrating: Floss, Floss, Floss!
(151–2)

This type of shifting is something of a trademark in VN's novels, where the fictive memoirists are shown in a permanent struggle with the particulars of their past. An example, almost a parody of the foregoing one, occurs in *Lolita* when Humbert Humbert recounts his confrontation with the Slavic lover of his wife, Valeria. Claiming first that he does not even remember "[the] ridiculous name" (29–30) of his rival, Humbert goes on to depict Valeria's final departure in a taxi – abruptly hitting upon the forgotten item by way of a purely verbal association:

[40] [. . .] Maximovich! his name suddenly taxies back to me [. . .]
(31)

A related incident from Van Veen's memoir:

[41] [Van] had read somewhere (we might recall the precise title if we tried, not Tiltil, that's in Blue Beard . . .) that a man can recognize a Lesbian young and alone [. . .], by a combination of three characteristics: [a list of characteristics follows]. Nothing whatever of all that (yes – *Mytilène, petite isle,* by Louis Pierre) seemed to apply to Cordula [. . .]
(*A,* 164–5)

Or from that of Hermann Karlovich, where a space of several pages separates the two mentions of the "pince-nez" motif:

[42] The waiter came up, a pale little man with pince-nez (it was not the first time I had seen a pince-nez'd waiter, but I could not recall where and when I had seen one before).
[. . .]
Where the deuce had I already seen a pince-nez on a waiter's nose? Ah? – it comes back to me (only now, while writing this!) – at a rotten little Russian restaurant in Berlin; and that other waiter was very like this one – the same sort of sullen straw-haired little man, but of gentler birth.
(*Ds,* 89, 92)

Consider also *Pnin:*

[43] Sometime, somewhere – Petersburg? Prague? – one of the musical clowns pulled out the piano stool from under the other, who remained, however, playing on, in a seated, though seatless, position, with his rhapsody unimpaired – where? Circus Busch, Berlin!
(68)

What was observed above on the scale of single passages – an emphasis on N-agent's own mnemonic efforts – may be extended to govern also larger structural blocks in a narrative. Here the problem comes to concern those cases where the temporal and spatial locus of NS is made to undergo quite concrete changes in the course of the narrating. One may recall e.g. a striking instance from *Despair,* where Hermann begins his eleventh chapter with an announcement that since the conclusion of Chapter Ten "disaster made [him] shift [. . .] quarters" (207). Similarly in *Ada* it is told that while writing his work "Van Veen [. . .] liked to change his abode at the end of a section or chapter or even paragraph" (365). In order to specify the role given to such strategies in the author's writing I now select for a close inspection his personal memoir – an extremely well-known documentary text, but also one that has only seldom been treated as an example of specifically *narrative* literature.[17]

The handling of "time" in *Speak, Memory* would be an interesting topic in its own right. Unlike a conventional autobiography, namely, the story of the author's life is not arranged according to a trivially chronological pattern, that is from the birth of the subject (in 1899) until the time when the writing of his work was in effect undertaken (in the late 1940's). On the contrary, the plot observes a veritable zig-zag principle, with each chapter devoted to a single major "theme", the manifestations of which are traced by the author from their earliest occurrence in the history to a variety of terminal points in his subsequent adulthood. (This, we recall, is precisely how VN envisions his task as an autobiographer: "The following of [. . .] thematic designs through one's life" [27].)

For instance, the theme of "tutors", taking up Chapter Four (79–94; rehearsed also in Five [95–118] and Eight [153–72]), is followed from the first decade of the present century, when the future novelist was coached by a sequence of English nurses, up to his years in exile when he himself subsisted by giving lessons in English – the chapter fittingly terminating in a description of a walk taken by VN with a former tutor "in the nineteen forties" (94), now already in his new English-speaking homeland. The theme of "erotic awakening" in Chapter Ten (195–213) is first introduced in a scene where the author takes in passages from a Mayne Reid book as a boy of eleven; it runs through the account of his friendship with cousin Yuri (who brings him the book), his contacts with the American "Gala Girls" in Berlin, or his "ocular" relationship with Polenka back at the family manor; the whole complex of motifs being again synthesized in a reference to the author's having re-read Mayne Reid while himself journeying through the American landscapes depicted in the initial book (200–1). Similarly the theme of "poem composition" (Chapter Eleven [215–27]) has its origins in the summer of 1914, but it is also present in the poetic meditations accompanying the writing of the actual memoir more than three decades later ("[. . .] the poet [. . .] sitting in a lawn chair, at

17. An intelligent survey of the "revisited" 1966 version of *Speak, Memory* is provided in a review-article by APPEL 1967a and b. Patterns of interlinking imagery and motifs in the text are discussed by MOYNAHAN 1971, 10–6; E. BRUSS 1976, 127–62; STUART 1978, 163–91. GRAYSON (1977, 139–66) has dealt with the manifold relationships existing between the separate versions of the memoir – a question that will prove relevant also with regard to the shifting locus of NS in the definitive version.

Ithaca, N.Y." [218]). The span of narrated time is still wider in Chapter Six (119–39), tracing "the theme of lepidoptery" from the first stirrings of the author's entomological interest in the early 1900's *via* his career as a professional entomologist in USA, up to a collecting-trip undertaken in Switzerland in the 1960's (cf. the encounter with the "sturdy Swiss hiker" [129]) when the rewriting of *Speak, Memory* was already in progress.[18]

Paralleling this tendency on the plot-level of the narrative, the temporal locus of the memoirist also tends to observe a pattern of its own. It does not move in a linear fashion, as we might expect from a memoir, but rather crisscrosses with apparent whimsicality over a period totalling almost twenty years. The announced time of writing may be anything between the 1940's and mid-1960's, just as the memoirist himself seems to be permanently on the move, changing locations and even shuttling between two continents while writing and rewriting the story of his personal past. The following distinct "layers" of NS may be isolated from the revised 1966 version of the memoir.

(i) *1940's.* Somewhat paradoxically, the temporal locus in the concluding Chapter Fifteen – in the chapter having as its topic the *most recent* developments in the narrated history – would seem to *precede* all other clearly demarcated occurrences of NS in the memoir. In other words, what happened "last" to the memoirist on the level of the history (his becoming a father) was in effect narrated by him "first". Discoursing on the birth of his son in Berlin VN writes:

> [44] I think bourgeois fathers – wing-collar workers in pencil-striped pants, dignified, office-tied fathers, so different from young American veterans of today or from a happy, *jobless Russian-born expatriate of fifteen years ago – will not understand my attitude* toward our child.
> (299)

– which enables us to locate NS in 1949 (1934+15) on purely intratextual evidence: the birth-date of Dmitri Nabokov has been given as "May 10, 1934" in Chapter Thirteen (cf. the caption facing 257) and it is repeated in the concluding chapter (295). The temporal locus of the memoirist in ex. [44] also serves to motivate the opening clauses of Fifteen ("Our child is growing [. . .]" [295]) or the mention of "*young* [. . .] veterans" (above), which might otherwise seem puzzling from the standpoint of the mid-1960's.

(ii) *USA.* Other references in the text lead us to place NS within a period that extends from the late 1940's until the end of the next decade. In terms of space (or better, geography) we know that this was a phase in the author's life when he kept constantly traveling across his adopted country (cf. Foreword to the memoir, 10). What we are offered are glimpses of VN composing his work against the background of some quite distinctively American settings:

> [45] The other day, near the place where I am recording these matters, I came across a

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18. For the distribution of "themes" in the memoir cf. also APPEL 1967a, 30; E. BRUSS 1976, esp. 149–54. The end result of such manipulations is a quite manifestly stylized quality, not often met in properly autobiographic writing. The achievement is well described in this formulation by STUART: "[*Speak, Memory*] is an autobiography, but it is not a record, or account of facts [. . .]. It is imaginative narration in which events, actions, details of landscape [. . .], are rendered significant by a single, ordering consciousness, It is, in short, fiction [. . .] not opposed to fact [. . .] but the way fact is born" (1978, 164).

farmer and his son (the kind of keen healthy kid you see in breakfast food ads), who were [. . .] diverted by the sight of a young cat torturing a baby chipmunk [. . .]
(223)

Elsewhere, references occur to "a car [with a] New York license plate" (218) driving past the author while he is writing; to a ranch, rented – "in the spring of 1953" (195) – somewhere in the Midwest for the specific purpose of working over the text; or to sentiments clearly reflecting the experience of a recent immigrant, rather than that of a fully Americanized author (the position adopted by VN in most sections of the memoir):

[46] Today, in a new and beloved world, where I have learned to feel at home as easily as I have ceased barring my sevens [. . .]
(277; cf. also 61, 92, 119, 126 *passim*)

Another occurrence is seen in the "Mademoiselle" section (Chapter Eight), where the author at one point overtly intrudes into a rhapsody on a sleigh ride taken by his former governess back in the winter of 1905:

[47] Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland? How did I get here? Somehow, the two sleighs have slipped away, leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snowboots and stormcoat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my old blood singing. All is still, spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy's rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to glittering frost-dust between my fingers.
(99–100)

Temporal terms given in the excerpt ("sixty years crumble") require that NS be here placed in 1965 (1905+60). On the other hand, this again results in one of the many anomalies underlying the narrative, for the date is no longer consistent with the "New England" background applied by the author (cf. below [iii]–[iv]). It is appropriate, in this sense, that the initial version of ex. [47] actually read: "[. . .] forty-five years [1905+45=1950] crumble [. . .]" ("Mademoiselle O"; *ND,* 145). Compare also the adjustments in the later, Russian version: "*polveka* [1905+50=1955] *zhizni rassypaetsja moroznoj pyl'ju*" (*SM* R, 88).[19]

(iii) *1960's.* A third series of references locates NS within still another period: the years when the author was already residing at Montreux, Switzerland, where the final version of his memoir was written (Foreword, 14). Such occurrences may be altogether straightforward, as when VN refers to certain documents that had come into his possession only after "1961" (173), or to the publication of other materials "in 1965" (29; for related shifts to the sixties cf. also 117, 125, 146, 275 *passim*). But in frequent instances they are more indirect, requiring that the reader deciphers the connection on his own. I have in mind such references as the following from Chapter Nine, paraphrasing a series of publications by V.D. Nabokov on criminal law:

[48] In one of these ("Carnal Crimes", written in 1902) my father discusses, rather prophetically in a certain odd sense, cases (in London) 'of little girls *à l'âge le plus tendre*

19. For obvious reasons, the French text, written as early as 1936, omits the "New England" references altogether (MO F, 153).

(*v nezhneyshem vozraste*), i.e. from eight to twelve years, being sacrificed to lechers (*slastolyubtsam*)'.
(178)

What is "prophetic" about this is, of course, the fact that a similar setting was to be used by VN himself some five decades later in his best-known novel (overtly named in Chapter Three: "*Lolita* [. . .] was on her way [. . .]" [65]). It was the American publication of *Lolita* in 1958 that enabled the author to retire to Switzerland and begin his work on a new version of the memoir. Other allusions to the post-*Lolita* period include the mention of "letters from madmen" that the author says he has been receiving "since the year of grace 1958" (168); the description of his access as a schoolboy to "five-rouble pieces coming from the bank in appetizing, weighty sausages", in the recollection of which he may freely indulge "now that [his] proud émigré destitution is [. . .] a thing of the past" (234); or the sly definition of small girls encountered by the author in St. Petersburg as "nymphets" (203) – a term that gained currency only after the uproar caused by *Lolita.*

(iv) *Montreux.* As a final example we should notice the following, featuring a shift from a train journey taken by the author as a boy of ten, directly to the circumstances surrounding him as he evokes the incident in his present residence at Montreux:

> [49] At a collapsible table, my mother and I played a card game called *durachki.* Although it was still broad daylight, our cards, a glass and, on a different plane, the locks of a suitcase were reflected in the window [. . .]. It was a long, very long game: on this gray winter morning, in the looking glass of my bright hotel room, I see shining the same, the very same, locks of that now seventy-year-old valise [. . .]
> (142–3)

Afterwards it is added that the said valise had been acquired as early as "1897" for the wedding trip of the author's mother (143). In this way, due to a rather cunning temporal move we are here given our last glimpse of the author, putting his finishing touches to the text, as it were, even while it is already being forwarded to its readers (1897+70!).[20] And, as the outermost layer of NS in the memoir is hence seen to virtually coincide with the actual publishing of the book, we may determine its final inbuilt symmetry, taking us back to the beginning: what came "first" in the author's history (i.e. the wedding of his mother) was committed by him to the paper "last" in terms of his temporal position as a memoirist (cf. above [i]).

An easy explanation for all such "inconsistencies" – if we prefer calling them that – could be found from the actual printing history of the work. As we know, and as the author tells us in his Foreword (9–16), *Speak, Memory* appeared in several guises over

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20. In the Russian version the scene of the writing was staged in Oregon, and the age of the valise was calculated differently (1953–50=1903):

> *Ljubopytno, chto sejchas, v 1953-m godu, v Oregone, gde pishu eto, vizhu v zerkale otdel'nogo eti zhe samye knopki togo zhe imenno, teper' pjatidesjatiletnego, materinskogo nesessera*
> [*It is curious that at the present, in 1953 in Oregon, where I am writing this, I see in the looking glass of another room the locks of this very same valise, now fifty years old, that once belonged to my mother]
> (*SM* R, 132)

The earlier English version omits all references to the valise (cf. FL; *ND,* 44).

an extended period of time. Individual chapters were brought out in a selection of American publications between 1943 and 1951 (the "Mademoiselle" chapter had come out even earlier, in Paris); two of them were printed as "short stories" ("Mademoiselle" in *Nine Stories* and *Nabokov's Dozen,* "First Love" in *Nabokov's Dozen*); and the separate sections were collected for the first time only for the 1951 edition (*Conclusive Evidence*). They were thoroughly revised by the author for the 1954 Russian version (*Drugie berega*), and – further revised and updated – they constitute the definitive, "revisited" text of the 1966 edition. It is only to be expected that the final product contains traces of this decades-long process of translation and recycling.

At the same time, I would maintain that there exists also an internal, mainly thematic motivation for the persistent emphasis on NS in the narrative.[21] It would have been a simple task indeed for the author to synchronize all references to his present self in the text, but for reasons of his own he declined to do so. I shall return to these reasons after a look into certain purely novelistic applications of the pattern.

Ada as a Parody

Since the initial publication of *Speak, Memory,* the author continued experimenting with memoiristic techniques in the domain of his fiction. In these cases he often came close to outright parodying the first work. While e.g. *Look at the Harlequins!* is a quite overt parody (the fictive teller – "Vadim Vadimovich" – himself terms his discourse a "memoir" [8]), other novels by the author also rehearse those specific strategies that we encountered in the foregoing discussion.[22] By way of an example, I propose to detail here the manifold shiftings that occur on the level of NS in *Ada,* providing to my mind a veritable development *ad absurdum* of the structural principle canonized only three

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21. I refer again to GENETTE, who has treated a somewhat similar problem with regard to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past:* "Narrative analysis must register these shifts [of NS] – and the resulting discordances – as effects of the actual genesis of the work; but in the end analysis can look at the narrating instance *only as it is given in the final state of the text* (1972, 225; my emphasis).

22. Consider e.g. the following memory reference from *Look at the Harlequins!:*

> A beloved Cockney nurse had looked after me from 1900 [. . .] to 1903. She was followed by a succession of three English governesses [. . .] whom I see over the shoulder of time [. . .] (123)

And *Speak, Memory:*

> Over the shoulder of my past I admire again the crucial picture (82)

Similarly, as in *Speak, Memory,* the narrative in *Look at the Harlequins!* is presented as the result of an extended process. In Part One, Chapter Ten of the latter work Vadim's mention of "nowadays" (52) becomes parenthetically specified as "1970" (*ibid*), whereas in Part Four, Chapter Three "the moment of writing" (168) is said to be "February 15, 1974" (*ibid*). Other fictive memoirists in VN's novels require less time. Humbert Humbert tells that he wrote the narrative in *Lolita* in "fifty-six days" (300); in *Pale Fire* Kinbote composes his Commentary to Shade's poem in less than three months after the poet's death (cf. the dating of his Foreword on 29); and in *Despair* Hermann Karlovich finishes his two-hundred-page discourse in one week (cf. 205).

years earlier in the definitive version of the author's memoir.[23]

As in *Speak, Memory,* the duration of the narrative act in *Ada* is placed between quite overtly stated temporal brackets. The most explicit reference appears at the close of Part Five, Chapter Four, as Van Veen looks back upon his literary labors. Purportedly lying on his deathbed and dictating the "definitive" version of his text to a secretary, Van expounds on his own status as a writer:

> [50] As Ada, Mr. Oranger [. . .] and Van[24] were discussing those matters one afternoon in 1957 [. . .], it suddenly occurred to our old polemicist that all his published works [. . .] were not epistemic tasks set to himself by a savant, but buoyant and bellicose exercises in literary style. He was asked why, then, did he not let himself go, why did he not choose a big playground for a match between Inspiration and Design; and with one thing leading to another it was resolved that he would write his memoirs – to be published posthumously.
>
> He was a very slow writer. It took him six years to write the first draft and dictate it to Miss Knox, after which he revised the typescript, rewrote it entirely in long hand (1963–1965) and redictated the entire thing to indefatigable Violet, whose pretty fingers tapped out the final copy in 1967. E,p,i – why '*y*', my dear?
> (578)

Precisely as in *Speak, Memory,* again, traces of this sustained process are threaded throughout the larger part of the discourse. Often attended by further indices of editorial as well as Ada's "sororial" proof-reading (e.g. the "lectorial, sororial, editorial brackets" on 577), such overt markers enable us to differentiate between a number of separate phases in the compositional history of the narrative. Compare for example this typical insertion appended to one of the first chapters in the book:

> [51] (Van, I trust your taste and talent but are we *quite sure* we should keep reverting so *zestfully* to that wicked world which after all may have existed only oneirologically, Van? Marginal jotting in Ada's 1965 hand; crossed out lightly in her latest wavering one.)
> (15; emphases in the text)

Or the following:

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23. Scholarship on *Ada* is vast. However, much of the work done so far on the novel has devoted itself to decoding more or less separate textual puzzles, allusions and linguistic games (which are interesting in their own right: cf. in this regard the remarks in a fine essay by ALTER 1979, 107). Considerably less attention has been given to the underlying narrative system in the text – indeed, many critics have been of the mind that the text does not hold any specific "system" at all (e.g. FOWLER 1974, 176–7). To my knowledge, the question of N-agent's situation in the novel has been previously referred to only in discussions by APPEL 1970b, 163–4; MASON 1974, 122–6; CHRISTENSEN 1981, 38–40. Cf. also the pertinent comment by MADDOX: "the [. . .] Nabokov book which *Ada* most closely resembles is the autobiography, *Speak, Memory*" (1983, 104).

24. *Ada* is one of those Nabokovian novels where N is made to alternate between "first-person" and "third-person" references to his own self. Van Veen may do this even within the bounds of a single sentence, as in the following:

> In a series of sixty-year-old actions [. . .] I, Van, retired to my bathroom [. . .] and using a temporary expedient [. . .] vigorously got rid of the prurient pressure as he had done last time seventeen years ago.
> (490)

In the main, it is indicated that Van applies the third person when referring to his past and switches to the first person whenever taking up his present tasks as N, but this system is not followed with any particular faithfulness. Cf. e.g. 31, 70, 73, 121, 361, 578, 587.

[52] Summer 1960? Crowded hotel somewhere between Ex and Ardez?
Ought to begin dating every page of the manuscript: Should be kinder to my unknown dreamers.
(122)

Here is a list of the principal moments in this game with NS in Van Veen's chronicle.

(i) *1892.* Despite the assertion in ex. [50] above, we should note that the first move in the compositional game does not belong in the 1950's, but rather in an epoch dating back to the memoirist's earliest apprenticeship as a writer. As it is indicated in Part Two, Chapter Seven, the initial impetus for the work occurred more than sixty years prior to its actual writing. Pondering with his sister the obscene photographs snapped by a blackmailer, twenty-two-year-old Van Veen promises:

[53] That ape has vulgarized our own mind-pictures. I will either horsewhip his eyes out or redeem our childhood by making a book of it: *Ardis*, a family chronicle.
(406)

This is in fall 1892 (365–6).[25] It turns out, consequently, that Van has in one sense been preparing for his future role as a memoirist *even at the time of the narrated events.* The situation is not atypical of other Nabokovian tellers, kept permanently aware of the relationship between their perceived reality and its potentialities for being transformed into a narrative. (That Van did *not* write the initial book after all, is verified, in a rather casual parenthesis, three chapters later. It is told that in 1893 the blackmailer might have bothered Ada again "had he not been carried out of his cottage with one eye hanging on a red thread and the other drowned in its blood" [441]. The first part of the prophecy in ex. [53] has hence been fulfilled.)

(ii) *1922.* The next layer of NS in the chronicle follows (i) by precisely three decades. "I am today [. . .] fifty-two" (536), as Van writes at the opening of Part Four, taken up for a large part by his philosophic treatise "*The Texture of Time*" (535–51, 559–61). This treatise, we are told elsewhere, was composed in Van's mind during his two-day drive towards the city of Mont Roux, Switzerland, where the final reconciliation with Ada was to take place. (Compare: "And now I drive into Mont Roux [. . .]. Today is Monday, July 14, 1922 [. . .]. The author is in a confused state of exhilaration, exhaustion, expectancy and panic." [551]) We are to assume that portions from the earlier text have been included by Van into the primary narrative, while at the same time reminders of its original composition are allowed to flow freely into the philosophic discourse. Hence the frequency of "traffic" metaphors in this section, each of them acquiring the status of a small NS-marker in its own right.[26]

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25. Many of my subsequent calculations are based on the "Family Tree" -section in the novel, listing the precise birth years of each main protagonist. The tree is printed on one of the front leaves of *Ada.*

26. VN has himself referred to his technique of having "the illustrative metaphors [in *Ada*], all built around one viatic theme, gradually accumulate, come to life, and form a story turning on Van's ride [. . .] – after which the thing again disintegrates and reverts to abstraction [. . .]" (*SO,* 289). It might be added that Proust regularly uses expanded metaphors in *Remembrance of Things Past* for the purpose of telling "a story".

For example:

> [54] Why is it so difficult [. . .] to bring the notion of Time into mental focus and keep it there for inspection? What an effort, what fumbling, what irritating fatigue! It is like rummaging with one hand in the glove department for the road map [. . .]
> (537)
>
> [55] Space does not always require Time – or at least does not require more time than the 'now' point of the specious present contains in its hollow. The perceptual possession of a unit of space is practically instantaneous when, for example, an expert driver's eye takes in a highway symbol.
> (542)
>
> [56] To give myself time to time Time I must move my mind in the direction opposite to that in which I am moving, as one does when one is driving past a long row of poplars and wishes to isolate and stop one of them, thus making the green blur reveal and offer, yes, offer, its every leaf. Cretin behind me.
> (549)
>
> [57] The normal motorist, according to psychologists and policemen, can perceive, visually, a unit of time as short in extension as one tenth of a second [. . .] It would be interesting to measure the instant we need to become aware of disappointed or fulfilled expectation. Smells can be very sudden, and in most people the ear and sense of touch work quicker than the eye. Those two hitchhikers really smelled – the male one revoltingly.
> (550–1)

After this the two lovers are reunited, and the continuation of the properly *narrated* history is interrupted. We are given only minimal information concerning the decades of cohabitation with Ada that precede Van's decision to commit his memoir on paper (cf. 567–75: the rest of the pages in Part Five refer to the time of the narrating rather than to the narrated history).

(iii) *1957–1967.* It is thirty-five years after (ii) that Van Veen, now at the truly venerable age of eighty-seven, takes on the concrete narrative task (above ex. [50]). The overall process is again cut into a number of phases, the ordering of which constitutes a separate pattern in the background of the narrative. While the story of Van's and Ada's romance progresses in its main articulations in a linear fashion (from the first Ardis summer in 1884 to the reunion at Mont Roux), its retelling would appear to be wholly a-chronological, with the teller working over the episodes in any random sequence.[27]

Compare:

> *1960*
> [58] Van, thank goodness, is ninety now [1870+90] [. . .]
> (104; cf. also 122, 141)
>
> *1961*
> [59] In a series of sixty-year-old actions [1901+60] [. . .] I, Van, retired to my bathroom [. . .]
> (490)

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27. Cf. here the author's comment on his own work over the episodes in *Speak, Memory:* "Although I had been composing these chapters in the erratic sequence reflected by the dates of first publication [. . .] they had been neatly filling numbered gaps in my mind [. . .]" (Foreword, 10).

1963

[60] When he called next day for the object (unrememembered now, eighty years later [1883+80]) [. . .]
(32)

1964

[61] Eighty years later [1884+80] he could still recall with the young pang of original joy his falling in love with Ada [. . .]. At ninety-four [1870+94] he liked retracing that first amorous summer [. . .]
(70; cf. also 147)

1967

[62] Today is my ninety-seventh [1870+97] birthday.
(567)

[63] For the first time in their love story, the blessing, the genius of lyrical speech descended upon the rough lad, he murmured and moaned, kissing her face with voluble tenderness, crying out in three languages [. . .] pet words upon which a dictionary of secret diminutives was to be based and go through many revisions till the definitive edition of 1967.
(121; cf. also 295)

(iv) *"Ada's hand".* Concurrently with the above insertions, pointing back to Van's narratorial control, there occur several passages assigned directly to his sister (cf. also above ex. [51]). The suggestion is that aside from aiding his brother in the task of evoking their joint history, Ada may on occasion take over the narrative task altogether (as on 70–1), correcting or even actively disagreeing with the manner employed by Van in recording a given patch of the past:

[64] It is not necessary, here or elsewhere, there was another similar passage, to blotch a reasonably pure style with vague anatomical terms that a psychiatrist remembers from his student days. In Ada's late hand.
(118; cf. also 97–8, 120, 162 *passim*)

In all, there are forty-two separate segments in the text that may be attributed to Ada. The first of these occurs already in the first chapter of Part One ("[. . .] marginal note in Ada Veen's late hand" [9]), whereas no indication is given of her participation after Part Two, Chapter Five. Her last note is occasioned by Van's description of dead Lucette on 370. Are we being led to assume that she herself *dies* after this point, never reaching the end of her brother's manuscript?[28] Van later puts forward the ominous suggestion that neither of the two tellers may be living at the time when the narrative is finished:

[65] By the way, who dies first? [. . .] Ada. Van. Ada. Vaniada. Nobody. [. . .] [R]eaders [. . .] should be unable to make out [. . .] who exactly survives, Dava or Vada, Anda or Vanda.
(584)

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28. For surely something more must be at issue here than the author's simply "los[ing] interest" in the device, as has been argued by some of his more impatient critics (FOWLER 1974, 179). The proposal that both Ada and Van die while working on the last version of the manuscript has been convincingly defended by MASON 1974, 124. Her claim that Ada's interpolations cease as early as Part One, is not accurate, however, for there are quite unmistakable insertions still on 338, 339, 340, 342 and 370. Compare e.g. Two, Five:

[Van] 'Tell Rattner', she said, gulping down her third brandy as if it were technicolored water. 'Tell him' (the liquor was loosening her pretty viper tongue) –

[Ada] (Viper? Lucette? My dead dear darling?)
(370)

(v) *"Ed."*

> [66] With the exception of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Oranger,
> a few incidental figures,
> and some non-American citizens, all the persons
> mentioned by name in this book are dead.
>
> [Ed.]

As the curt notice on the front leaf of the novel confirms, regardless of who might have died "first", by the time that Van Veen's chronicle reaches the reader its author is no longer alive (cf. also the stipulation that the text is to be brought out "posthumously" in ex. [50] above). This finally allows us to choose the various markers of editorial intervention in the discourse as representing the *outermost* frame in the system of layers that constitutes the narrative in *Ada*. It is the fictive editor ("Plump, short, bow-tied Mr. Oranger" [577] as he has been identified at one point of the narrative) who prepares for print the latest version of Van's manuscript. It is he who preserves Ada's marginalia in the definitive text, and it is he again who on occasion adds some more or less ill-chosen scholia of his own (e.g. the corrective to a presumed slip-up on Ada's part: "sic! 'run' in her blue stocking. Ed." [335]; altogether, there are twenty-four separate insertions).[29]

As Van's narrative draws close to its conclusion, the volume of such interventions becomes noticeably prominent (cf. Part Five, 576–8, 587, 588–9), hence again suggesting that the aging memoirist does not himself survive to direct the editing of his text. At the same time, increasing markers of the true situation behind the narrative keep reminding us that the end is – quite literally – near. The concluding paragraphs in the memoir are symptomatic in this respect:

> [67] Was it time for the morphine? No, not yet. Time-and-pain had not been mentioned in the *Texture*. Pity, since an element of pure time enters into pain, into the thick, steady, solid duration of I-can't-bear-it pain; nothing gray-gauzy about it, solid as a black bole, I can't, oh, call Lagosse.
>
> [. . .]
>
> In the latest *Who's Who* the list of his main papers included by some bizarre mistake the title of a work he had never written, though planned to write many pains [. . .] There was no pain to do it now – and it was high pain for *Ada* to be completed.
> (586, 587)

Time and pain – the two realities presiding over the level on which the narrative is generated – drive Van Veen to terminate his labors, while the narrated history at last overtakes its narration. What remains is the finished book, containing the record of Van's struggle with narrative forms for the better portion of his remembered life ([i]–[iii]), Ada's contributions ([iv]), and the network of editorial adjustments ([v]). The

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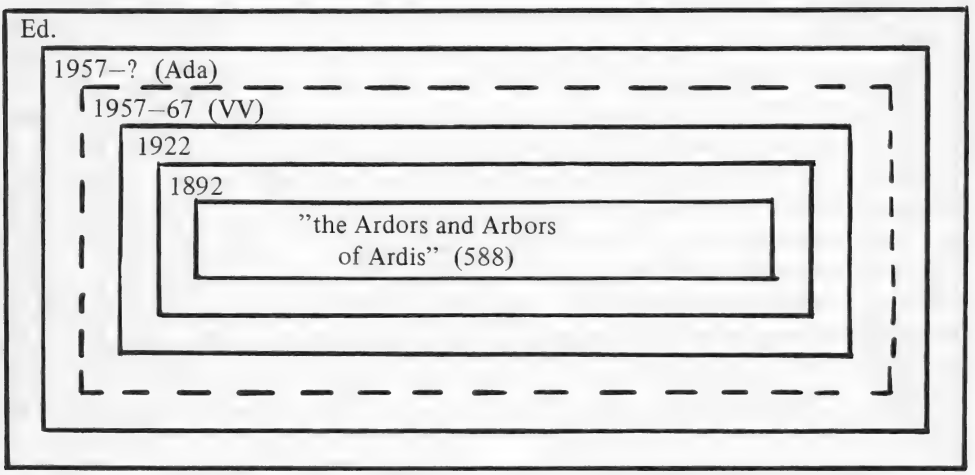
29. There would seem to be little ground for the claim, put forward by GRABES, that Van "invents an editor" (1977, 80). Isn't it precisely the addition of the editorial level that grants a certain degree of "realism" to Van's and Ada's embedded discourse? We should remember that the device of a fictive editor has been put to use in other novels by the author – not only in *Pale Fire*, where it determines the entire narrative structure, but also in *Despair* (Hermann's "first reader" [90–1, 168]) and *Lolita*, where the embedded narrative is introduced in a separate editorial Foreword (5–7). Also Humbert Humbert's narrative is brought out "posthumously" (*L*, 5, 300).

chronicle ends with a self-laudatory blurb (588–9), presumably appended after the writer's death by its editor. In this way, the ending provides at least an emblematic correlate to Van's previous claim that, if he had to die, it was to be –

> [68] [. . .] *into* the finished book, into Eden or Hades, into the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb.
> (587; Van's emphasis)

Fig. 2
Van's Book in *Ada*



Thematic Import

What is the outcome from this intense preoccupation with N-agent's embedding level – not only in the two texts described above, but in Nabokovian narration on the whole? Let us recall a few further instances of NS-evocation from the author's major works of fiction.

> [69] The dogs are barking. I am cold. That mortal inextricable pain. Abominably cold. Dogs barking: one of them begins and then all the others join in. It is raining. The electric lights here are wan, yellow. What on earth have I done?
> (*Ds*, 220)

> [70] Unless it can be proven to me – to me as I am now, with my heart and my beard, and my putrefaction – that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art.
> (*L*, 275–6)

> [71] This daily headache in the opaque air of this tombal jail is disturbing, but I must persevere. Have written more than a hundred pages and not got anywhere yet [. . .]. Don't think I can go on. Heart, head – everything.
> (*ibid*, 109)

[72] Whatever energy I possessed has quite ebbed away lately, and these excruciating headaches now make impossible the mnemonic effort and eye strain that the drawing of another such plan would demand.
(*PF*, 107)

[73] I wish I could provide the reader with cut-out figures and parts of attire as given in paper-doll charts for children armed with scissors. It would brighten a little these dark evenings that are destroying my brain.
(*ibid*, 123)

[74] So the trivial patter went. Who does not harbor in the darkest gulf of his mind such bright recollections? Who has not squirmed and covered his face with his hands as the dazzling past leered at him? Who, in the terror and solitude of a long night –
(*A*, 258)

[75] I am weak. I write badly. I may die tonight. My magic carpet no longer skims over crown canopies and gaping nestlings, and her rarest orchids.
(*ibid*, 221)

The common denominator, a rather obvious one, between all such excerpts is the emphasis they place on the *plight* of N at the time when his narrative is conceived. There is a distinctly "pathetic" or poignant side to the NS-settings used by the author in his fiction. His memoiristic tellers are repeatedly made to comment on their bouts with physical illness (Kinbote's and Humbert's "excruciating headaches" in exs. [71]–[72]) or insanity (Hermann, Humbert, Kinbote); their sense of loss and isolation (Humbert's loss of Lolita, Van's longing for Lucette, Kinbote's full-scale isolation from his surroundings); or their fear of old age and incoming death (Van Veen, we remember, is finishing his tenth decade when he utters exs. [74]–[75]).[30] Humbert Humbert is writing his memoir in jail; Hermann Karlovich is about to be jailed for killing a man; Van Veen has driven Lucette to suicide; Kinbote has been an unwilling accomplice in the killing of Shade. Each of them has led a life of unnatural acts, concealed desires, and disappointments. Accordingly, the motifs of guilt, self-hatred, and despair are permanently present in the background of these, quite unmistakably Nabokovian narratives.[31]

Critics who accuse VN of laying excessive emphasis on the stylistic surface-features of his novels often overlook the larger narrative context provided for such linguistic play.

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30. Compare in this respect the reference in "Time and Ebb" to N-agent's "ninety-year-old organism" (*ND*, 125) or the final section of Vadim's memoir in *Look at the Harlequins!* (239–53). Madness lurks at the background of the narrative in "Terror" (cf. N-agent's own acknowledgment that "[his] brain is doomed" [*TD*, 121]) as well as in " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' ", "In Memory of L.I. Shigaev", or *The Eye*. N-agent's personal loss has been effectively used in "*Ultima Thule*" – initially planned as a chapter in a novel – where the whole impetus for Sineusov's telling is derived from the death of his wife. As VN explains in a note to the latter text, according to his original plan the embedded narrative was to have constituted "a pathetic act which does not let [Sineusov] triumph over death even in the world of free fancy" (*RB*, 147).

31. E.g. Humbert's self-flagellations for having corrupted Lolita (rather than for the murdered playwright), Hermann's lamentations for having blundered away his plan, or Van's regret for Lucette. As for Kinbote, the ultimate source for his anguish should be sought in the disappointments caused by his homosexuality. Countering what he perhaps regarded as overly flippant readings of *Pale Fire*, VN himself once pointed out that, in one of the most pathetic passages in the novel, "Kinbote begs 'dear Jesus' to relieve him of his fondness for faunlets" rather than to merely "cure his headache" (*SO*, 290).

What may well appear to us as overly polished and involuted – Humbert Humbert's "fancy prose style" (*L*, 11), or Van Veen's almost pathological verbal jugglery – is not necessarily an artistic fault in the framework of the comprehensive novel, for the main task of these devices is still to actualize N-agent's own response to the situation in which he has been placed on the level of his present existence. It is, I put it, *the chasm opening between the crafty verbal surfaces employed by N in recounting his life and the real-life circumstances manifesting themselves behind the telling* that is most consistently manipulated by the author in his memoiristic narratives.

Lecturing on the achievement of Russian nineteenth-century writers VN has observed that "[a] deep pathos [. . .] pertains to all authentic art because of the breach between its eternal values and the sufferings of a muddled world" (*Lectures 2*, 2). In his novels he often allows fictive N-agents themselves to reflect on the opposition between "art" and "life" that underlies their stylized discourse.[32] Humbert Humbert's afore-cited comment on "the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art" (ex. [70]) or his similar remark on "hav[ing] only words to play with" (*L*, 33) give voice to a dilemma confronting every Nabokovian memoirist, stranded between the limitations of his medium and the poignant realities of his life. Whenever N seems to be getting truly in his stride, he is immediately cut short by a veritable "attack of reality" (to apply a term coined by BROOKE-ROSE [1976, 531] for a somewhat different method of illusion-breaking in the Jamesian narrative). We are again reminded of his present guilt, pain, and mortality. This occurs e.g. when Humbert evokes his fateful night with Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters hotel:

> [76] So this was *le grand moment*. I had left my Lolita still sitting on the edge of the abysmal bed, drowsily raising her foot, fumbling at the shoelaces and showing as she did so the nether side of her thigh up to the crotch of her panties – she had always been singularly absent-minded, or shameless, or both, in matters of legshow. [. . .] In a few minutes – say, twenty, say half an hour, *sicher ist sicher* as my uncle Gustave used to say – I would let myself into that '342' and find my nymphet, my beauty and bride, imprisoned in her crystal sleep. [. . .] And my only regret today is that I did not quietly deposit key '342' at the office, and leave the town, the country, the continent, the hemisphere – indeed the globe – that very same night.
> (*L*, 122)

Or when he recalls her tennis game:

> [77] No hereafter is acceptable if it does not produce her as she was then, in that Colorado resort between Snow and Elphinstone, with everything right: the white wide little-boy

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32. What is more, they are on occasion made to comment self-consciously on their literary antecedents. I have already referred to certain similarities between devices favored by VN in his writing and Proust's techniques in *Remembrance of Things Past* (above, notes 1, 8, 11, 21, 26). The Proustian memoirist is also kept aware of the harsh realities existing behind his involuted narrative design – as e.g. Humbert Humbert would seem to acknowledge in his remark that "had [he] not been forestalled by another internal combustion martyr", the latter half of his memoir might have been entitled "*Dolorès Disparue*" (*L*, 247). Other allusions to Proust (the penultimate volume of his work was entitled, of course, *Albertine disparue*) occur in *Lolita* on 18, 77, 258. Cf. also *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* ("[. . .] that Proustian parenthesis [. . .]" [51]), *Pale Fire* (87, 161–2, 248), or *Ada*, where Van Veen specifically warns his readers against "the marcel wave of fashionable art" (542). In another instance he points out that the "special asparagus" once consumed at Ardis "does not produce Proust's After-effect, as cookbooks say" (254).

shorts, the slender waist, the apricot midriff, the white breastkerchief whose ribbons went up and encircled her neck to end behind in a dangling knot leaving bare her gaspingly young and adorable apricot shoulder blades with that pubescence and those lovely gentle bones, and the smooth, downward-tapering back. Her cap had a white peak. Her racket had cost me a small fortune. Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair.
(*ibid,* 226)

Consider the possibility of *Lolita* cleansed of all such shiftings: the result would indeed be a mere aggregate of more or less audacious verbal hijinks. In a similar manner, it is precisely this type of penetration of N-agent's "reality" into the embedded narrative that preserves the poignancy of such amply stylized novels as *Despair* (cf. Hermann's comment on his reliance on "the mock marriage of a pun" [56]) or *Pale Fire,* where Kinbote's games of "word golf" are extended even through his Index (cf. 315 *passim*). In *Ada,* the notion is again rehearsed in an altogether explicit form, as Van Veen points out that all his linguistic inventions are ultimately determined by the overriding poetics of "articulate art".[33] Compare his comment on the actions leading to Lucette's suicide:

[78] In a series of sixty-year-old actions which now I can grind into extinction only by working on a succession of words until the rhythm is right, I, Van, retired to my bathroom [. . .]
(490)

Or on his own death-throes:

[79] The Veens had believed for a whole summer of misery [. . .] that it was a touch of neuralgia.

Touch? A giant, with an effort-contorted face, clamping and twisting an engine of agony. Rather humiliating that physical pain makes one supremely indifferent to such moral issues as Lucette's fate, and rather amusing, if that is the right word, to constate that one bothers about problems of style even in those atrocious moments.
(587)

The same opposition, finally, is a factor to be reckoned with when reading *Speak, Memory,* presenting us with the quintessential memory-narrative in the canon. This is not simply the retelling of "a sugar-plum life in a sugar-plum kingdom", as the work has been termed – with quite unexpected harshness – by a normally discerning reviewer (BERBEROVA 1967, 406), although we may easily concede that on the level of the embedded history the proffered recollections do carry apparent traces of idealization. ("Perfect Past" was in fact the title chosen for Chapter One upon its first appearance as a magazine-piece in 1950 [Foreword to *SM,* 10].)

It is entirely appropriate that as early as in the fifth paragraph of Chapter One the position of the memoirist is located on "a ridge of *remote, isolated, almost uninhabited time*" (22; my emphasis), for his is also the story of accumulating personal losses, death and oblivion. VN refers to the real-life backdrop of his recollections e.g. when discoursing on the fate of his former French governess:

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33. In a review of *Ada,* UPDIKE has quite accurately contrasted the stylized figurations in the work to those moments when "author/hero, heavy with death, lumbers toward the lip of the stage" (1969, 69). For other comments on the alternation between stylization and "realism" in VN's fiction cf. also JOSIPOVICI 1964; GREEN 1966; APPEL 1967c, 112–14, 126–31, 139–40; 1970a, 371 *passim.* In my own discussion I have tried to show to what extent these effects rely on the role given to NS in individual narratives.

[80] I catch myself wondering whether, during the years I knew her, I had not kept utterly missing something in her [. . .] that I could appreciate only after the things and beings that I had most loved in the security of my childhood had been turned to ashes or shot through the heart.
(117)

And again at the close of the section on his summers at the family manor:

[81] I see again my schoolroom in Vyra, the blue roses of the wallpaper, the open window. Its reflection fills the oval mirror above the leathery couch where my uncle sits, gloating over a tattered book. A sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth pervades my memory. That robust reality makes a ghost of the present. [. . .] Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die.
(76–7)

Death figures prominently in the portraits of the author's father (literally shot through the heart in 1922 in Berlin [177 *passim*]); his mother (49–50); or his brother Sergey (257–8), whose fate occasions perhaps the most poignant pages in the entire memoir.[34] Death is present also in the descriptions of many a lesser figure in the narrated past: the vanished émigré friends (283–8); Uncle Ruka (68–77); Mademoiselle (cf. the entire Chapter Five: 95–118). In the concluding chapter of the work VN reflects on the inevitability of his own death, pronouncing here the overriding motivation behind the foregoing memoiristic enterprise:

[82] [. . .] I have to make a rapid inventory of the universe. [. . .] I have to have all space and all time participate in my emotion [. . .] so that the edge of its mortality is taken off, thus helping me to fight the utter degradation, ridicule and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence.
(297)

To have "all space" and "all time" come together in a single instant is a feat that one will never accomplish on the level of everyday reality, but in *Speak, Memory* the author has constructed as accurate a parable as possible of such an effort. "I confess I do not

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34. Noticeably, just like his fictive protagonists, the author of *Speak, Memory* also has his moments of guilt and remorse in the course of his narrative. Compare e.g.:

It is one of those lives that hopelessly claim a belated something – compassion, understanding, no matter what – which the mere recognition of such a want can neither replace nor redeem.
(258)

Or other recollections connected with the author's unfortunate brother:

[. . .] I kept self-sufficiently overtaking poor gamely stumbling Sergey, one of those galling little pictures that revolve on and on in one's mind.
(205)

[Sergey] spent hours on end playing snatches of operas, on an upstairs piano well within earshot. I would creep up behind and prod him in the ribs – a miserable memory.
(257)

[. . .] the only person who memorized the music and all the words was my brother Sergey, whom he hardly ever noticed, who also stammered, and who is also now dead.
(74)

One does not wish to claim that what we have here is some sort of an "origin" for the sentiments expressed by Van Veen for his deceased half-sister in *Ada*, or by V for his half-brother in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. But the use of such sentiments *as a literary device* throughout the opus is still worth a mention.

believe in time" (139), he writes in another key passage in the book. Through the ordering of the spatio-temporal motifs in his memoir VN has managed to both suggest his imprisonment within the confines of a "finite" life and to demonstrate his art in manipulating time as a purely narrative element. What emerges from the work is not a trivial image of the past, but an account of a creative struggle to order one's recollections into a literary structure. What the text asserts is the permanence of these efforts in the face of man's temporally limited existence.[35] In this, as in many of its other features, *Speak, Memory* proves itself to be an integral part of the larger thematic system that we have been here charting.

3.2. *Narrative Embedding: The Problem of Inter-Level Correlations*

3.2.1. The Problem Described

So far, we have treated the phenomenon of narrative embedding mainly in terms of *time*. The story of N-agent's past has been assumed to stay contained within the present of his narrating self, while markers of the latter were seen constantly pervading the narration, in this way keeping us aware of "real life" behind the constructed "fiction". What will be taken up next presents us with more or less an inverse case, for the suggestion frequently built into VN's writing is that not only does reality intrude upon narrative constructs: *fiction, too, may come to affect the framework of reality inside which it is embedded.* This is a most distinctively Nabokovian strategy, but before we turn to its uses in individual narratives it will be necessary to make some remarks of a more general order.

"A Dream in a Dream of a Dream in a Dream"

As in many previous instances, VN turns out to have provided a very accurate description of his own method by way of commenting on the art of another. In an essay entitled "The Lermontov Mirage", originally written for the centennial of the poet's death in 1941,[36] VN singles out for special attention one poem, which he chooses to call "A Dream in a Dream of a Dream in a Dream" (cf. 32–4).

This five-stanza piece[37] observes the following structural idea. It opens in a manner that is conventional enough: with an announcement that it is the lyrical speaker's dream that will be described ("I dreamt that with a bullet in my side/ [. . .] I lay"), and the first two stanzas proceed to define further the embedded dream-setting ("[. . .] a hot gorge of Daghestan [. . .]"). In his commentary VN proposes to mark the first dreamer as A1. What is remarkable, however, is that the primary dream proves to contain still additional

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35. "Imagination is a form of memory", as the author says in one interview – therefore, "both memory and imagination are a negation of time" (*SO*, 78). Van Veen is still more explicit about the same notion: "In 'real' life we are creatures of chance in an absolute void – unless we be artists ourselves, naturally" (*A*, 426).

36. The essay was published in 1944. It has been reprinted in an altered form as "Translator's Foreword" to *A Hero of Our Time* (*HOT*, v–vii and *passim*). My references are here to the initial version.

37. To Russian readers the text is known as "*Son*" ("Dream" [1841]). VN later transformed the title into "The Triple Dream" (*HOT*, vi).

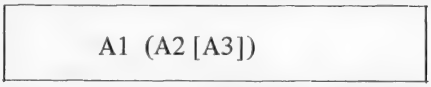
levels of embedding: the dream-self of A1 also sees a dream, the contents of which are described in the remaining three stanzas ("[. . .] in a dream I saw the candle-flame/ Of a gay supper in the land I knew [. . .]"). The marking A2 is used by VN for the secondary-level dreamer. And this is not all, for during the dream-supper there will appear a third dreamer (A3): a young woman who again sees in her mind a dream-like vision. Her triply embedded reverie is the topic of the concluding stanza:

> [83] [. . .] in her dream she saw a gorge, somewhere
> In Daghestan, and knew the man who lay
> There on the sand, the dead man, unaware
> Of steaming wound and blood ebbing away.
> (33)

Hence the outer and inner dreams depicted in the poem appear to coincide; the dreamer contained inside the deepest level of embedding (A3) again assumes the place of the external dreamer (A1), and – in VN's apt formulation: "[. . .] the circle is completed. The dreamer drifts back to the surface, and the full stop at the end of the poem comes with the exactitude of an alarm clock" (33–4). Following the directions given by the author, the entire development may be summarized in a simple diagram. (I am aware of making the matter rather painfully obvious, but the same scheme will yet prove useful in explaining certain immeasurably more intricate constructions.)

Fig. 3

A Scheme for Narrative Embedding



A1 ⟷ A3 = A1 correlates with A3

That this structure is described by the author in terms of a "dream" is not surprising. VN has often reflected on the relationship between dream and reality in his writing. The afore-cited essay was written to praise Lermontov for his express ability to create "a fluid and iridescent medium wherein reality discloses the dreams of which it consists" ("The Lermontov Mirage", 32).[38] Discussing the work of another Russian writer renowned for somewhat similar effects, VN observes:

> [84] The characters [in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*] are nightmare people in one of those dreams when you think you have waked up while all you have done is to enter the most dreadful (most dreadful in its sham reality) region of dreams.
> (*NG*, 42)

On the domain of his fiction, the author has elevated this type of an encounter with "sham reality" into one of the most persistently recurring settings of his novels. In *King, Queen, Knave,* it is Franz who is depicted waking up multiple times, only to find himself each time on a new "stratum of sleep" (20–1). The sequence is again closed with a

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38. *Re* "mirages" cf. also the following passage from *The Gift:*
> [. . .] there were mirages – the mirages where nature, that exquisite cheat, achieved absolute miracles: visions of water were so clear that they reflected the *real* rocks nearby!
> (118; emphasis in the text)

generalizing digression on the misleading character of all reality perceived by our senses:

> [85] Yet who knows? Is this reality *the* reality, or just a new deceptive dream?
> (21; emphasis in the text)

The same happens with Hermann in *Despair* (106–7); Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading* (11); Shade in *Pale Fire* ("Pale Fire", ll. 874–84; 65); or Sebastian Knight, who is shown in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in the act of devising tales about "his dreams, and the dreams in his dreams, and the dreams in the dreams of his dreams" (148–9). Also Smurov in *The Eye* is made to discourse on the dream-like nature of his existence:

> [86] It is frightening when real life suddenly turns out to be a dream, but how much more frightening when that which one had thought a dream – fluid and irresponsible – suddenly starts to congeal into reality!
> (101)

And the reoccurrence of his dilemma in *Transparent Things,* written more than forty years later, well attests to the consistency of the author's underlying vision:

> [87] Men have learned to live with a black burden, a huge aching hump: the supposition that 'reality' may be only a 'dream'. How much more dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being aware of reality's dreamlike nature were also a dream, a built-in hallucination!

All this should not suggest to us merely the statement that reality indeed is a "dream", which amounts to a hoary platitude. Rather, we should take notice of an important qualification added by the author. What is specifically made suspect in VN's fiction is the notion of any perceptible reality existing apart from its imaginatively *constructed* (or outright *narrated*) presentations. The author has himself commented on this when once replying to a query concerning his views on "realism" in fiction:

> [88] Your use of the word 'reality' perplexes me. To be sure, there is an average reality, perceived by all of us, but that is not true reality: it is only the reality of general ideas, conventional forms of humdrummery, current editorials. Now if you mean by 'old reality' the so-called 'realism' of old novels, [. . .] then you are right in suggesting that the reality faked by a mediocre performer is boring, and that imaginary worlds acquire by contrast a dreamy and unreal aspect. Paradoxically, the only real, authentic worlds are, of course, those that seem unusual. [. . .] Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate a subjectively perceived texture.
> (*SO,* 118)

It is, we may infer, principally such a notion that determines the shape of those instances that will be surveyed below. There is always an active *rivalry* constructed between separate narrative levels – or between separate "dreamers" – in Nabokovian narration. Each of the narrative agents is depicted searching for a more authentic version of the reality that he perceives around him. And as it will turn out, it is not always the agent seated on the highest perch in the narrative hierarchy who is allowed to prevail, but rather the one who is able to compose a better fiction.

On Levels

Such rivalry has been a much-treated topic in recent narratological studies, even though I have not seen many theorists – besides VN – citing examples from classical Russian poetry. The most systematic approach originates again in GENETTE (1972, esp. 227–

37; 1983, 55–64), whose views have been appropriated by a number of subsequent investigators (among others by RIMMON 1976a and b; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 91–4; BAL 1977, 59–85 and 1981a; BROOKE-ROSE 1981, 333–8 *passim*).[39]

As we recall, Genette proceeds by distinguishing between three separate levels in narrative structure. The first of these, the one on which the history is recounted by fictive N, he calls the "extradiegetic" level (corresponding to our previously described level of NS). The level of the narrated history (NW-level) is termed "diegetic" in the Genettean model, and any level embedded within the history (generated on the level of NW) is regarded as "metadiegetic".[40] Those paradoxical instances where the embedded levels appear to be "containing" their outer frames Genette has described as *metalepses.* It will be noticed that our present problem concerns particularly the second half of his definition:

> [. . .] any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator [. . .] into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), *or the inverse* [. . .], produces an effect that is either comical or fantastic.
> (234–5; my emphasis)

Now, it does not require a great effort to discern in Genette's carefully-drawn distinctions an overall affinity with the previous scheme, laid out by VN himself some three decades earlier. Exactly as narrative theorists are today probing into the interchangeability of fictive levels, so also VN has always been fascinated with those specific instances where the "dream" turns out to contain within itself the very "reality" of its dreamer (above *Fig. 3*).

On a more general plane, we are reminded of other parallels, providing a point of contact between the Nabokovian practice and a common structural property much in favor among contemporary artists. In their remarks on interrelations between cultural artifacts LOTMAN et al. have drawn pertinent attention to the occurrence of "structures which 'overflow' their boundaries" in plastic and graphic arts (1973, 61): statues descending from their pedestals, pictures made to extend out of their frames, and so forth.[41] In narrative literature, the best-known example has been introduced by Lewis

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39. Compare also TODOROV (1971, 70–3) on the coincidence between narrative embedding and embedding as a strictly linguistic (i.e. syntactic) phenomenon. As Todorov points out, embedded narrative structures may easily be involuted *ad infinitum,* although in actual practice his example from *1001 Nights* – embedding "to the fifth degree" (71) – is unlikely to be exceeded. In a related discussion, PELC (1971, 15–16) has compared the same structure with the Russian *matreshka* doll, in which a given number of ever smaller figures are encased within one another. Another often-used comparison likens the structure to "Chinese boxes" (e.g. ROMBERG 1962, 64–6).

40. Genette's choice of terms may be misleading here. It has been pointed out that in its accepted logico-linguistic sense the prefix "meta-" would seem to connote a level situated one step *higher* than the diegetic level, rather than one below. For this view cf. BAL 1977, 24; 1981a, 41–3; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 140. Cf. also Genette's comment in GENETTE 1983, 61. The point is a valid one, but as I do not aim to preserve the Genettean terminology in my discussion, it will not be necessary to quibble about nomenclature here.

41. We recall e.g. M.C. Escher's *Drawing Hands* (1948) – a picture of two hands in the act of drawing each other – or Saul Steinberg's *Self-Portrait* (1946): a picture of a man drawing the line of which he himself consists. For a fine discussion of such instances cf. RIMMON-KENAN 1982. I have tried to explain some literary uses of this structure in TAMMI 1983b.

Carroll, who included in his *Through the Looking-Glass* a parable entitled, remarkably, "Which Dreamed It?". If the looking-glass world represents a dream thought up by Alice, and if this dream contains a creature who is dreaming of Alice, is it any longer possible to differentiate between embedded and embedding levels in the tale (CARROLL 1872, 341–4)? "In the dream of the man that dreamed, the dreamed one awoke", as Jorge Luis Borges wrote in his story "The Circular Ruins",[42] and an essentially similar paradox has served as the basis for a range of experimental fiction – including VN's novels – produced by some major twentieth-century writers. (For overviews cf. GENETTE 1972, 235–6 and 1983, 58–9; ALTER 1975a, 138–79; BAL 1977, 61–85; LODGE 1977, 239–45; DÄLLENBACH 1977, 151–208; RIMMON-KENAN 1982 and 1983, 94. An adept analysis of Robbe-Grillet's novels from this standpoint is given by BROOKE-ROSE 1981, 291–310, 333–4.)[43]

VN himself never particularly savored such collations between himself and other contemporary writers. With regard to Borges he has stated quite bluntly that "[he] owe[s] no debt whatsoever [. . .] to the famous Argentinian essayist" (*SO,* 289). While this of course does nothing to abolish the structural parallels, we might still do well to notice what is distinctive to the author's use of Genettean "metalepses" in his fiction.

In our previous example from the Lermontov poem, the coincidence of the embedded dream-level with the primary level of the dreamer was readily apparent in the text. The three levels were introduced in consecutive stanzas, while the lyrical speaker himself ensured in his discourse that even the most casual reader will grasp the *clou* of the construction. This is also the case in Carroll, Borges, and in fact in most of the other instances usually cited by theorists to illustrate hierarchic reversals in fiction.[44] In a typically Nabokovian narrative, on the other hand, the play with embedded levels is activated by correlating seemingly quite distant elements in the discourse. The intrusion of one level into another is often signalled through the occurrence of most microscopic

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42. Borges's epigraph is taken from *Through the Looking-Glass* (BORGES 1941, 57; for the quoted passage cf. 61). It would be easy to list almost identical passages from the Nabokovian output, many of them conveived before Borges's story. Cf. "*Ultima Thule*":

> [. . .] how paltry seem all the bygone clairvoyants: the dust raised by the herd at sunset, the dream within the dream (when you dream you have awakened) [. . .]
> (*RB,* 149–50)

Or the afore-cited Lermontov-essay:

> I am reminded [. . .] of the Chinese poet who dreamt he was a butterfly and then, when he awoke, could not solve the problem whether he was a Chinese poet who had dreamt that entomological dream, or a butterfly dreaming that it was a Chinese poet.
> ("The Lermontov Mirage", 34)

VN was of course a great aficionado of Carroll, and in fact translated *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian as early as 1922 (cf. the bibliographic entry in FIELD 1973, 162).

43. French theoreticians of the novel have coined the term *mise en abyme* – a fiction contained within another one of which it is at the same time a model. Cf. e.g. DÄLLENBACH 1977. I think that the problem is identical with the one treated here.

44. In one of the standard examples from the Argentinian essayist – the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" – it is the "intrusion of the fantastic world into the real one" (BORGES 1941, 32) that is singled out as the express topic of the narrative. Cf. also examples from Robbe-Grillet in BROOKE-ROSE 1981, 295–6; Flann O'Brien in ALTER 1975a, 223–4; Kurt Vonnegut in LODGE 1977, 242–3; or Christine Brooke-Rose in RIMMON-KENAN 1982, 26–7.

textual items, quietly buried into diverse points of the structure. The overall result, familiar to us from VN's other uses of the correlation-device, renders the impression of a veritable "game" in which the reader's deciphering skills are pitted directly against those of the author's literary heroes – themselves often shown in the act of decoding those inner fictions that they come across on the level of their own reality.[45]

Accordingly, what will constitute our main object of analysis in the following is the Nabokovian manner of planting hidden correlations between separate levels of embedding in a narrative. It is in this specific sense that we may use the term *inter-level correlation.* I shall first go through some characteristic instances in a selection of the author's prose fiction.[46] After this I shall concentrate on the uses of inter-level correlations within the system of a single text. The text chosen for a closer scrutiny will be *Pale Fire,* where the cultivation of this strategy has to my mind resulted in VN's major achievement as a fiction-writer.

In *Nikolai Gogol* the author states:

> [89] The sudden slanting of the rational plane of life may be accomplished of course in many ways, and every great writer has his own method.
> (140)

My next remarks concern the Nabokovian method.

3.2.2. Inter-Level Correlations in Action: A Survey

Any fictional narrative may contain *new fictions* on the level of its narrated history: dreams and reveries, pictorial artifacts, invented books, or other "texts within texts" embedded within N-agent's primary discourse (GENETTE 1972, 235–6; BAL 1977, 44–6; DÄLLENBACH 1977, 15–31; BROOKE-ROSE 1981, 295–7). As this is clearly possible with regard to either of our two main categories of N, I shall not be restricting the analysis solely to the intrinsic type of narration. Nonetheless, my primary interest will be in the potentialities of embedding in a memoiristic context.

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45. Borges's dictum on the parallel positions of fictive characters and readers of fiction is too famous to be reiterated here. It has been cited e.g. by GENETTE 1972, 236; ALTER 1975a, 1; DÄLLENBACH 1977, 218.

46. Problems connected with inter-level correlations in VN's fiction have been previously discussed – though not in these terms – in a book-length study by DAVYDOV 1982. This is an important work, centering on the question of embedded narratives as an intratextual property as well as on their relationships with other literary texts (i.e. on their *intertextual* dimension). On the other hand, Davydov chooses his examples only from four Nabokovian texts: "Lips to Lips" plus three Russian novels (*Despair, Invitation to a Beheading, The Gift*), whereas here an attempt is made to keep an eye more or less on the author's entire novelistic output. This is why there will be only occasional overlapping between our respective discussions, although I am quite willing to acknowledge the pioneering role of Davydov's study. In addition, narrative structuring in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* has been treated in the second part of the essay by RIMMON (1976b). Along with *Pale Fire,* this is a Nabokovian novel where correlations between embedded levels are elevated into the main organizing factor of the narrative (below 3.2.3.). I would have myself liked to say more about Sebastian Knight here, but the quite admirable thoroughness of Rimmon's analysis precludes any further comments. For other references to the question cf. APPEL 1970a, xxix–xxx; COUTURIER 1979, 100–7. I shall be concentrating on such instances as have received less attention in criticism.

> [90] As some of you may have guessed, I am politely but firmly opposed to the Freudian interpretation of dreams with its stress on symbols which may have some reality in the Viennese doctor's rather drab and pedantic mind but do not necessarily have any in the minds of individuals unconditioned by modern psychoanalysis.
> (*Lectures 2,* 175)

This is VN himself, discoursing on Tolstoj's use of the dream-within-the-text device in *Anna Karenina,* and his comment warns against any attempt to explain in simple psychoanalytic terms the predilection for fictive dreams in his own writing. "All dreams are anagrams of diurnal reality" (80), as the burlesque psychiatrist in *Transparent Things* says, giving voice to the standard notion of our fantasies as no more than a reflection of real-life experience. In VN's fiction, by contrast, it is often the dream, hallucination, or mirage, that keeps impinging on the outer level of the narrated reality.[47]

(i) *Prophetic Dreams.* Dreams may be called "prophetic" when they prefigure occurrences taking place on the embedding levels of the narrative (rather than *vice versa:* cf. VN's remarks on Tat'jana's and Anna Karenina's dreams in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* [*EO* 2, 6 and 503]). A rather representative instance is seen again in an episode from the author's memoir, where one of his childhood illnesses is described (*SM,* 36–9). During this particular illness, VN recounts, he was reposing on his bed when he suddenly saw in his mind a vision of his own mother, speeding along the St. Petersburg avenues in a sleigh. When the sleigh came to a stop, she was next seen entering "Treumann's", a shop specializing in writing implements (aptly chosen, the name also underlines the dream-like quality of the setting: '*Traum*' = German for 'dream', 'hallucination'). Having made her purchase she comes out, her footman now carrying something that looks to the dreamer as a disproportionately large pencil. And after a while the vision becomes real, as the dreamer awakes to find his mother entering the room: she is holding a "giant polygonal Faber pencil" (38) that she has just purchased as a present for her ailing son.

This small incident finds literally dozens of counterparts in the author's fiction.[48] In *Laughter in the Dark,* Albinus's banally erotic day-dreams of "coming across a young girl lying asprawl on a hot lonely beach" (11) are reproduced, with an ironic symmetry, both at the early phase of his affair (when Margot is observed lying "spread-eagled on the platinum sand" [72]), and at its disastrous conclusion: stalking his mistress in the Berlin apartment blind Albinus is once more reminded of "the air above sand on a very hot day by the sea" (185), and after the last shot has been fired his mind reverts to "[the] bright sand of pain [. . .] that blue, blue wave" (187; cf. also: "Carpet – bulging [. . .] in a frozen wave" [*ibid*]). Similarly prophetic are Margot's own reveries of herself as "a

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47. Moreover, many of the narrated dreams in VN's texts are designed as explicit parodies of "Freudian" notions. One of Humbert Humbert's nightmares in *Lolita* comes complete with "auctioneered Viennese bric-à-brac" (248), and in another instance he himself lampoons "pseudoliberations of pseudolibidoes" (20). Cf. also: "I am sure Dr. Blanche Schwartzmann would have paid me a sack of schillings for adding such a libidream to her files" (54).

48. The incident is "prophetic" in more ways than one, for it also anticipates the author's future career as a writer. VN himself urges the reader to collate this episode with instances from his fiction (cf. *SM,* 37). It has been repeated in an almost identical form in *The Gift,* where it is Fyodor who dreams of his mother (28–30).

screen beauty [. . .] helped out of a gorgeous car by a gorgeous hotel porter under a giant umbrella" (19), which become concretized when Albinus later accosts her in front of a movie theater and picks up her umbrella (28). Compare also Irma's dream in the same novel, prefiguring her own funeral (i.e. the repeated motif of a "top hat" [*LD,* 103, 115]); Humbert Humbert's premonition of the shooting scene at Pavor Manor (*L,* 48, 289–90); or V's ghoulish dream in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (176–8), anticipating both Sebastian's death (191) and his own nightmare-journey to the dying man's bedside (180–4).

In *Glory,* such play with fictive dreams emerges as a central organizing "idea" in the narrative.[49] Martin himself marvels on one occasion at "the property that his reveries had of crystallizing and mutating into reality" (109). The primary instance of such mutations occurs in connection with Martin's dream of "climbing into" the watercolor that hangs above his bed in his childhood. This reverie is inspired by a nursery tale (i.e. another fiction) read to him by his mother, and the picture (within the tale) becomes described in some detail at the opening of the novel:

> [91] On the bright wall above the narrow crib [. . .] hung a watercolor depicting a dense forest with a winding path disappearing into its depths. Now in one of the English books that his mother used to read to him [. . .] there was a story about just such a picture with a path in the woods, right above the bed of a little boy, who, one fine night, just as he was, nightshirted and all, went from his bed into the picture, onto the path that disappeared into the woods.
> (4–5)

As it turns out, these are some of the key motifs that keep appearing at various stages of Martin's adult life. E.g. at Yalta, on the eve of his journey to exile: "[The] moon's scintillating wake enticed one in the same way as had the forest path in the nursery picture [. . .]" (20); during a soccer game at Cambridge: "[. . .] a forest path along which you run and run" (108); after his train ride to Molignac: "He began to follow the forest path, the path unwound, kept unwinding [. . .]" (156); or in the directions forwarded to him at Switzerland: "[. . .] then all the way through the wood – it's a very dense wood [. . .]" (177). After Martin has performed his ultimate exploit – crossing over the border to the U.S.S.R. – the same setting becomes activated through Darwin's unwitting point of view. The suggestion would seem to be that in the concluding scenes of the novel the dream has finally materialized irrespective of its dreamer:

> [92] Darwin [. . .] said something under his breath, rubbed his cheek pensively, and walked on. The air was dingy, here and there tree roots traversed the trail, black fir needles now and then brushed against his shoulder, the dark path passed between the tree trunks in picturesque and mysterious windings.
> (205)

In addition, *Glory* displays still other instances of embedded anticipations. Martin's boyhood daydreams of exile (135) are replayed in his real life down to the most minute detail (136). His romantic reverie of "[a] sudden silence between two people in some dimly lit room [. . .]" (82) begins unexpectedly unfolding during the nocturnal episode with Sonia (92–4; notice the detail of an "ashtray" on 94). His premonition of the Cambridge waitress Rose as a grotesque bride – "wearing white kid gloves, pulled on

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49. We may recall that at the time of its initial printing the novel was taken to task by émigré reviewers expressly for its lack of any "idea". Cf. OSORGIN 1932, 3; VARSHAVSKIJ 1933, 266–7.

with difficulty" (104) – materializes after a period of several months when he comes across an unknown girl, later identified as Rose, of whom at first "nothing was visible [. . .] except a hand, incongruously clad in a white glove" (120–1). During his stay at Switzerland, finally, even the seemingly irrelevant remark by "Gruzinov" – "I never eat ice cream" (177) – discloses a symmetric linkage. A number of years, and more than 150 pages earlier, Martin has dreamt of himself –

> [93] [. . .] sitting in his classroom with his homework not done, while Lida kept idly scratching her shin as she told him that Georgians did not eat ice cream: '*Gruziny ne edyat morozhenogo*'.
> (12)

(ii) *Twinned Dreams.* In his lectures on *Anna Karenina* and *Ulysses* VN pays separate attention to the "twinned dreams" assigned to Anna and Vronskij, Stephen and Bloom (the section entitled "The Double Nightmare" in *Lectures 2,* 175–82; cf. also *Lectures 1,* 326). In such instances correlations are constructed between two autonomous fictions, both of them embedded inside the primary level. A typical example occurs in *Pnin,* where motifs belonging to Pnin's dream – the flight from a palace, the motorboat, the beach (109–10) – reduplicate those attributed to Victor in a previous dream-episode (84–5, 86). A related instance occurs in *King, Queen, Knave,* as Franz's erotic reverie, containing "a perfectly credible motorcycle" (75) appears to affect Martha's dreams in another part of Berlin: she is purportedly awaked from her sleep by "a remarkably loud motorcycle" (*ibid*).[50] Humbert Humbert asserts in *Lolita* that long before he had met Annabel "[they] had had the same dreams" (16). And still in *Ada* Van Veen's dream of "a mountain smothered in snow, with people, trees, and a cow carried down by an avalanche" (292) is seen to coincide with Ada's report of her own reverie: "I must tell you my dream before I forget. You and I were high up in the Alps [. . .]" (296). The entire "twinned" structure of *Pale Fire,* as I shall seek to demonstrate further on, may be understood as a huge expansion of this elementary pattern.

Pictures within Texts

The graphic arts, allusions to specific artists and their artworks, have always figured prominently in VN's writing. This may be in part explainable on biographic grounds (on the author's own familiarity with painting cf. *SM,* 90–4) as well as on the basis of VN's overall fondness for cultural subtexts.[51] But he has also made copious use of invented pictures in his fiction, in these cases giving them a distinctly compositional function. (For similar uses of pictures within texts in Robbe-Grillet cf. BROOKE-ROSE 1981, 295–6 *passim.* She is overstating the case, however, when she claims that

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50. This correlation, like many others, is added to the English edition. Cf. *KQKn* R (74–5), where she is awaked rather by Dreyer's snoring.

51. Many previous critics have pointed out allusions to "art" in VN's works. APPEL (1970a, 382–3, 395, 425 *passim*) details a whole range of painters and paintings figuring in the background of *Lolita.* On *Ada* cf. also APPEL 1970b, 161; PROFFER 1974b, 278; MASON 1974, 158–63. In a tabulation furnished by BODENSTEIN (1977, n. 21 to Chapter X, unpagin.) altogether sixty-six painters are said to make an appearance in VN's novels. We should add at least the name of Ivan Konstantinovich Ajvazovskij (1817–1900), the Russian seascape painter, who is responsible for the "Ayvazovskian [. . .] rocks" in the fifth chapter of *Glory* (17).

these techniques represent something "unprecedented" in fiction.)

The watercolor-over-the bed episode, familiar to us from *Glory* (above exs. [91]–[92]), occurs again in a scene included in *Speak, Memory.* In Chapter Four of the memoir, VN recalls an aquarelle that once hung on the wall of his own nursery, showing "a dusky path [. . .] through one of those eerily dense European beechwoods, where the only undergrowth is bindweed and the only sound is one's thumping heart" (86). He also evokes an "English fairy tale" about a small boy who stepped out of his bed into a similar picture and explains that as a child he himself had dreamed of "climbing into the picture [. . .] and plunging into that enchanted beechwood" – after which an enigmatic note is added: "– which I did visit in due time" (*ibid*). The enigma becomes resolved only at the end of the chapter, as VN describes a walk taken some three decades later with a former tutor (fittingly, his drawing master):

> [94] 'And what about Yaremich?' I asked M.V. Dobuzhinski one summer afternoon in the nineteen forties, as we strolled through a beech forest in Vermont [. . .]
> (94)

The same compositional pattern – "real life" taking after an embedded pictorial artifact – is again a recurrent one in the author's novels. In the first chapter of *Pnin,* narration dwells at some length on one of the dreams assigned to the hero. Pnin's trip to Cremona has been cut short by a fit of illness, and he is compelled to pause on a bench in a small American town. The incident brings to his mind another one, dating back to his Russian childhood some four decades earlier. In a hallucination-like vision Pnin sees:

> [95] [a] [. . .] his mother's approaching eyes. [b] It was a Sunday in midwinter. [c] He was eleven. [d] He had been preparing lessons for his Monday classes at the First Gymnasium when a strange chill pervaded his body. [e] His mother took his temperature, looked at her child with a kind of stupefaction, and immediately called [. . .] the pediatrician Belochkin. [. . .] [He is put to bed and covered with blankets] [. . .] [f] A poor cocooned pupa, Timosha [. . .] lay under a mass of additional blankets; they were of no avail against the branching chill that crept up his ribs from both sides of his frozen spine. [g] He could not close his eyes because his eyelids stung so. [h] Vision was but oval pain with oblique stabs of light; familiar shapes became the breeding places of evil delusions. [i] Near his bed was a four-section screen of polished wood, [j] with pyrographic designs representing a bridle path felted with fallen leaves, a lily pond, an old man hunched up on a bench, and a squirrel holding a reddish object in its front paws. [k] Timosha, a methodical child, had often wondered what that object could be (a nut? a pine cone?), and now that he had nothing else to do, he set himself to solve this dreary riddle [. . .]
> (22–3)

A dream-vision in the mind of an old man, hunched up on a bench ([a]–[k]), containing a recollection of delusions once caused by fever ([h]–[j]), containing a reference to a picture seen in the dreamer's childhood ([i]–[j]), which once again refers back to "reality" outside the dream ("an old man hunched up on a bench" [j]) – this is a representative instance of those multiply embedded constructions that VN has always applied in his writing.[52] In the case of *Pnin,* the circular pattern is further complicated

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52. I have referred above to some purely graphic analogies of the pattern (n. 41). An all but direct parallel to ex. [95] would be found again from Escher, whose famous *Print Gallery* (1956) shows a picture containing within itself the very gallery in which it is being displayed, the person watching the picture, and in effect the whole of the depicted world. Cf. also TAMMI 1983b, 134.

through some additional manipulation of the narrated history. When Pnin awakes from his delirium, images belonging to the ancient picture continue their life on the level of his everyday reality. Compare the riddle of the "reddish object" ([j]–[k]) which now receives its solution behind the back of the dreamer:

> [96] A gray squirrel sitting on comfortable haunches on the ground before him was sampling a peach stone.[53]
> (24–5)

In *Ada,* such manipulations are laid entirely bare, as Van and Ada themselves have a sensation of "[being] transferred into [a] forbidden masterpiece" (140) during their session of love-making at Ardis – it has already been told in a previous passage that one of the painting in Uncle Ivan's pornographic collection "depict[ed] two misbehaving nudes, boy and girl, in an ivied and vined grotto [. . .]" (*ibid*). In an episode from the screenplay version of *Lolita* (missing from the novel), one of the murals placed in the Enchanted Hunters lobby – "three maidens dancing around the sleeping hunter" (*L* S, 113) – is quite similarly used to anticipate a subsequent scene. Here Humbert Humbert will himself become the centerpiece in an identical setting. Even the detail of "a bandage on [the] leg [of one mural-maiden]" (*ibid*) is faithfully reproduced by Humbert's real-life experience:

> [97] At poolside Lolita [. . .] and two other nymphets (one dark [. . .], the other fair, with a long scar on her leg) recline [. . .]. [O]wlish Humbert, [. . .] at some distance beyond the pool is sitting in a shadow-dappled garden chair.
> (Stage-directions on 131–2)

Also in *Laughter in the Dark,* the hero is allowed to glimpse details from his future life in a chance picture. About to enter a cinema at the opening of the novel Albinus observes "[a] poster [. . .] portray[ing] a man looking up at a window framing a child in a nightshirt" (13) – subsequently his own child will catch a lethal cold while peering down from a window at a man whom she mistakes for her father (cf. 103). The setting recurs in *King, Queen, Knave,* where the whole novelistic reality turns out to be duplicated in an embedded cinematic version. Dreyer's dressing gown has figured already in an early episode of the novel (39); Franz has repeatedly appeared in "a rather casual dark-red sweater" (155, 169, 250, 269); and "a black bathing suit" (224) is among the purchases made by Martha just before the fateful trip to the sea coast:

> [98] A little farther he crossed a square and saw [. . .] a huge picture, advertising the film to be shown on the opening night, [. . .] *King, Queen, Knave* [. . .]. The display consisted of three gigantic transparent-looking playing cards resembling stained-glass windows which would probably be very effective when lit up at night: the King wore a maroon dressing gown, the Knave a red turtleneck sweater, and the Queen a black bathing suit.[54]
> (216)

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53. Linguistic play gives still new twists to the pattern. Doctor "Belochkin" (above [e]) from Pnin's dreamt-up past mysteriously interconnects with his present reality *via* an Anglo-Russian pun (*belka* = 'squirrel'). There are many other instances in *Pnin* where the squirrel-motif migrates from one narrative level to another. Occurrences of the motif have been previously discussed by NICOL 1971, 198–200; BADER 1972, 87–92; CONNOLLY 1982, 197.

54. The reference to the embedded picture is missing from the Russian text (*KQKn* R, 208). For a similar addition cf. above n. 50.

In some cases even the most incidental artifacts may be used in producing the effect. When in *Bend Sinister* Krug first observes Mariette, "sinuously soaping her back" (145), he will soon afterwards come across "cream caramels (in bright wrappers with pictures of naked girls soaping their shoulder blades)" (150).

Moving Pictures and Drama

Some of the most venerable examples of inter-level correlations in literature are based on the device of embedded plays: the play within the play in *Hamlet;* the puppet-show in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister;* the shifting of roles in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (e.g. DÄLLENBACH 1977, 15–19, 23–4, 215–21 *passim*). In VN's works the stage-drama is often replaced by fictive cinema. One instance of this was seen in the case of the film "*King, Queen, Knave*" from *King, Queen, Knave* (above ex. [98]), presenting a duplicate version of the actual novel inside which it has been placed. Other examples occur e.g. in *The Defense,* where one of the movies viewed by Luzhin is made to covertly determine his own fate in the subsequent narrative (I have discussed this in 2.3.3.), or in "The Leonardo", similarly dating from the author's earliest Russian-writing period. In the latter text, the hero's criminal career becomes reflected in the picture that he happens to see just before his real-life uncovering as a counterfeiter. ("And after a while the sleuths were pursuing the baron. Who would have recognized in him the master crook?" [RB, 20].)[55]

In *Laughter in the Dark* the device is once more elevated from a local ploy into a larger organizing principle.[56] Albinus first glimpses Margot on the threshold of a cinema. What he later sees on the screen are episodes from a sequence that he fails to recognize for much of the remaining narrative:

> [99] He had come in at the end of the film: a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun.
>
> [. . .]
>
> A car was spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliffs and abyss.
> (13, 14–15)

Margot will herself recoil before Albinus's pistol at Rouginard (145–7). This will occur again during the final showdown at Berlin (185–7), and the scene is rehearsed also in Margot's preparations for a cinematic career of her own ("[. . .] she would [. . .] recoil before the barrel of an imaginary revolver" [45]). The fatal car accident will take place at the end of Albinus's frenzied drive from Rouginard (150–2). The outcome of the real-life sequence – Albinus's loss of his sight in the accident – hence provides a cruelly fitting closure for his previous reflections at the cinema. Because he had come in at the end of the film, Albinus muses –

> [100] There was no interest whatever in watching happenings which he could not understand *since he had not yet seen their beginning.*
> (13; my emphasis)

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55. In the Russian original of the story the correlation becomes again enhanced through a verbal convergence. "*Kto by uznal v nem glavnogo moshennika*" (Leon R; *VF,* 67); later on it will transpire that the hero is himself "*fal'shivomonetchik* [*a counterfeiter]" (71).

56. On the uses of cinematic allusions in *Laughter in the Dark* cf. also APPEL 1974, esp. 258–68. The essay by STUART (1970; expanded in 1978, 87–106) is entirely devoted to the question.

Embedded stage-drama reappears in a blatantly parodic function in *Ada,* e.g. when scenes from "Chekhov's *Four Sisters*" (427) are paraphrased in Van Veen's chronicle. The dramatic setting provides an obvious counterpart for the tangled relationships between the three siblings (Lucette-Van-Ada) on the reality-plane of the narrative,[57] and also the camera-carrying officer from the play ("Kim [. . .] Eskimossoff" [430]) will materialize as the Ardis kitchen-boy "Kim" (responsible for having photographed Van's and Ada's first couplings at the manor [cf. 396–409]). Another play within the novel occurs in the opening section, where Demon commences his affair with Marina after first seeing her in an unnamed musical, reportedly "based [. . .] on a famous Russian romance" (10). It will be as a result of this dalliance that both Van and Ada are born. Marina herself is cast as the sweetheart of the leading man in the play – "a local squire, Baron d'O" (11) – and afterwards one of her real-life lovers will turn out to be a certain "Baron d'Onsky" (13–15). Further on in the novel Marina will be courted by the movie-man "G.A. Vr*onsky*" (26; my emphasis) – or "Gavronsky" (18) – and still later she will be directed by another "Vronsky" (197 *passim*), whose emergence hence harks back to the opening fiction where it all, quite literally, began.[58]

On the Text-within-the-Text Device

It remains to comment on VN's evident fondness for allusions to invented "books" in his fiction. (This is the commonest case of narrative embedding, discussed e.g. in the chapter entitled "*Les livres dans le livre*" in KRISTEVA 1970b, 146–8. Cf. also the remarks on Gide's *Counterfeiters* by DÄLLENBACH 1977, 45–51.)

There is indeed a discernibly bookish quality to a typically Nabokovian narrative.[59] In more than a few of the author's works a significant portion of the discourse is taken up by direct quotations from fictive texts embedded within the main one. Fyodor's "*The Life of Chernyshevski*" is quoted in full as Chapter Four of *The Gift* (203–85) – it corresponds in this sense to the excerpts quoted from Van Veen's "*The Texture of Time*" in the fourth part of *Ada* (535–51, 559–61); Shade's "Pale Fire" in *Pale Fire* (33–69); sections taken from Cincinnatus's prison-diary in *Invitation to a Beheading* (51–3, 62–4, 89–97); or Ilya Borisovich's embedded novel "*Lips to Lips*", giving its title to one of the earliest sustained applications of the device in the canon ("Lips to Lips"; cf. *RB,* 47–50 *passim*).[60] References to fictive titles are among the staple

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57. The original Chekhovian play had only three sisters, of course. The fourth – named "Varvara" (*A,* 427) – may have migrated from *The Cherry Orchard.* For the allusive point cf. also KARLINSKY 1971, 2.

58. The plot-paraphrase of the embedded musical proves it to be an obvious takeoff of *Evgenij Onegin* (cf. 10–12). VN has allusively crossed the Pushkinian text (the source of "Baron d'O[negin]") and Tolstoj's *Anna Karenina* (whence "[Vr]onsky"). Marina plays Tat'jana (cf. 11–12); Van Veen later rehearses the scene between Onegin and Tat'jana in his words to Lucette (481); and the novel actually opens with an inversion of the first clauses from Tolstoj's text (3). In the subsequent narrative a number of episodes from either work will be reflected in the main plot-line. Cf. also KARLINSKY 1971, 2; JOHNSON 1971; PROFFER 1974b, 253–5 *passim.*

59. This is not a pejorative epithet. So VN himself refers to the figure of Onegin as "a character borrowed from books [. . .] and brilliantly recomposed by a great poet to whom life and library were one" (*EO* 2, 151).

60. DAVYDOV (1982, 10) singles out "Lips to Lips", written in 1931, as VN's first experiment

features of VN's novels: "*Tony's Adventures*" or "*The Gambit*" by Luzhin Sr. in *The Defense* (23, 60); Udo Conrad's "*Memoirs of a Forgetful Man*" or "*The Vanishing Trick*" in *Laughter in the Dark* (5, 86); Krug's "*Mikrokonzepsia*" in *Bend Sinister* (122); John Ray, Jr.'s "Poling Prize" -winning essay "Do the Senses Make Sense?" in *Lolita* (5); Van Veen's psychological treatises "*Information and Form*", "*Suicide and Sanity*", "*Compitalia*", "*When the Alienist Cannot Sleep*", and so forth (*A*, 578). There are even entire fictive outputs by writer-protagonists like Fyodor in *The Gift*, Sebastian Knight in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, John Shade in *Pale Fire*, Mr. R. in *Transparent Things*, or Vadim in *Look at the Harlequins!* (cf. the twelve-item list of "Other Books by the Narrator" on the front leaf of Vadim's narrative).[61]

Before we launch on an investigation of such instances within the confines of a single novel, I would still comment on their shared thematic motivation by aid of a succinct example from *Invitation to a Beheading*. Biding his time before the execution, Cincinnatus attempts to read books furnished by the prison library. At one point he flips through a voluminous novel entitled "*Quercus*" (122), described in the text as "a biography of [an] oak" (*ibid*) and purportedly couched in the form of a veritable world history as conceived from the standpoint of an ancient tree (cf. 122–3). After a while, however, he is again overwhelmed by the sordid circumstances of his prison-reality. Interrupting the reading, he lies down on his cot:

> [101] 'Will no one save me?' Cincinnatus suddenly asked aloud and sat up on the bed (opening his pauper's hands, showing that he had nothing).
>
> 'Can it be that no one will?' replied Cincinnatus, gazing at the implacable yellowness of the walls and still holding up his empty palms.
>
> The draft became a leafy breeze. From the dense shadows above there fell and bounced on the blanket a large dummy acorn, twice as large as life, splendidly painted a glossy buff, and fitting its cork cup as snugly as an egg.
> (125–6)

The transference of the "acorn"-motif from the imaginary world of the embedded novel into the hero's "real" world (not entirely unlike the case of the fictive "pine cone" from *Pnin* in exs. [95]–[96] above) strikes one as a barely concealed hint of the realm where Cincinnatus is to seek his own salvation.[62] In his previous dialogue with the headsman

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with the text-within-the-text device. We might notice also the case of *Kamera obskura* (*LD* R), published one year later, where the quoted excerpts from "Zegel'kranc's" unfinished novel are used to inform the hero of Margot's deceptions (147–8, 149–52). In the English version the fictive novelist was renamed "Udo Conrad", and the quotations from his text were omitted (cf. *LD*, 139).

61. In *Lolita* alone, Humbert Humbert's narrative incorporates references to literally scores of fictive texts: travelogues ("*A Vagabond in Italy*" [32]); catalogues and guidebooks ("*Who's Who in the Limelight*" [*ibid*], "*Your Home Is You*" [78], "*Know Your Own Daughter*" [170]); books for children ("*Girls' Encyclopaedia*" [92]); song lyrics ("Little Carmen" [62]); pulp fiction ("Troubled Teens" in one of Lolita's magazines [285]) as well as more highbrow materials (Quilty's "*The Enchanted Hunters*", paraphrased on 196–7). Untitled pieces, poems, letters, or other scraps of embedded discourse would be too numerous to tabulate.

62. The religious "Easter-egg" connotations of the motif are not to be taken altogether lightly. We have seen before that in VN's writing the world of art and imagination is sometimes paralleled with the notion of "another world" in its more properly theological sense (2.2.3.2.). For more on the use of Christian motifs in *Invitation to a Beheading* cf. SHAPIRO 1979; DAVYDOV 1982, 100–40.

Cincinnatus has given voice to the same notion in entirely unequivocal terms:

> [102] 'This is curious', said M'sieur Pierre. 'What are those hopes, and who is this savior?'
> 'Imagination', replied Cincinnatus.
> (114)

This suggestion will be seen to inform the remarkably more complex structure taken up in our next section.

3.2.3. Texts within Texts as a Structural Principle: "Real Life" in *Pale Fire*

There are two novels by VN in which the device of embedded texts is allowed to determine the comprehensive shape of the narrative. Both *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pale Fire* are shaped in the form of a literary biography. In the first work, it is the biography of the fictive novelist Sebastian Knight that is transmitted to us through the medium of "V", the fictive biographer, and it is the system of correlations constructed between V's primary discourse, the story of the subject's "real life", and the multiple "fictions" embedded within the story (Knight's novels) that poses the main problem to be solved by the reader.[63] In *Pale Fire,* we similarly have a fictive writer ("John Shade"), his embedded text ("Pale Fire"), and a separate discourse by a biographer calling himself "Charles Kinbote", but the relations between their respective levels are twisted even further. Here the biographer also goes on producing new fictions, which he himself proffers as rivalling versions of the other stories contained in the narrative. It again remains for the reader to decide the degree of authenticity assigned to each fictive level. Which of the two narrating agents is ultimately the primary one? What is the true order of embedding in the comprehensive system? And how is the import of the text affected by our choice between the several alternatives?

The shared compositional element in *Pale Fire* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* has been very nicely captured by the author in his last novel, where he includes in the list of Vadim's writings a fictive work entitled "*See under Real*" (cf. "Other Books by the Narrator" on the front leaf of *Look at the Harlequins!*). This self-parodic text within a novel contains, we are told, an appraisal written by a bungling biographer of a dead novelist and afterwards edited by the novelist's brother. The mechanism of the first novel – the novel written by Vadim – is described as follows:

> [103] As the opening chapter unfolded its first reptilian coil [. . .] there commenced what was to me the delight and the magic of my book: fraternal footnotes, half-a-dozen lines per page, then more, then much more, which started to question, then refute, then demolish by ridicule the would-be biographer's doctored anecdotes and vulgar inventions. A multiplication of such notes at the bottom of the page led to an ominous increase (no doubt disturbing to clubby or convalescent readers) of astronomical symbols bespeckling the text. By the end of the biographee's college years the height of the critical apparatus had reached one third of each page. Editorial warnings of a national disaster – flooded fields and so on – accompanied a further rise of the water line. By page 200 the footnote material had crowded out three-quarters of the text and the type of the note had changed, psychologically at least (I loathe typographical frolics in books) from brevier to long primer. In the course of the last chapters the commentary not only replaced the entire text but finally swelled to boldface.
> (*LH!*, 121)

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63. For reasons stated earlier, I refrain here from a more detailed analysis of narrative embedding in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Cf. above n. 46.

The footnote assuming the main role in a text; biographic discourse transforming itself into an autobiographic one; one fiction replacing another – these are some of the features that we encounter in reading *Pale Fire* as well. In order to state the matter more precisely, I shall first isolate the separate levels of embedding that make up the narrative in the novel. After this I shall discuss the correlation-technique through which the relationship between the embedded levels is rendered problematic. In the end I shall again probe into the thematic dimension of the system.

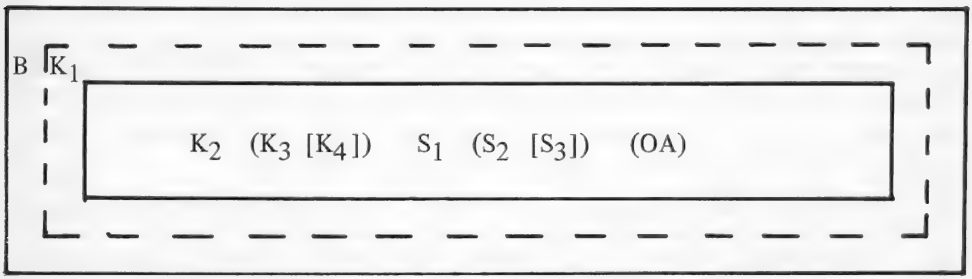
A Description of the Levels

It would be superficial to describe *Pale Fire* simply in terms of its four "parts": the 999-line poem by Shade (henceforth S [33–69]); its line-by-line Commentary by Kinbote (K [73–301]); plus a Foreword (13–29) and an Index (to the Commentary rather than to the poem [305–15]), either of them assigned to the latter.[64] In fact, the system of narrative embedding in the novel cuts straight through these outward divisions, calling forth a new look at the scheme of successive "dreamers" introduced at an earlier point of our discussion (above *Fig. 3* [3.2.1.]).

Pale Fire has been called "one of the most complex novels ever written" (KERMODE 1962, 671). This is where our problems begin.

Fig. 4

Narrative Embedding in *Pale Fire*



64. It is easy to see that the four-part ordering duplicates quite precisely the arrangement in VN's annotated edition of *Onegin*, published two years after but in fact written much before the novel (cf. Foreword to *EO* 1, xi). Also the first work comprises the complete text of an "embedded" poem; a gigantic Commentary; plus Introduction and more than a hundred-page Index. The extensiveness of Kinbote's commentaries, their polemical antics, as well as their overall insistence on the "authenticity" of the presented text, could no doubt be amusingly collated with VN's own scholarly enterprise, but this would be going outside the bounds of the present problem. And "[s]uch humdrum potterings" – as Kinbote himself says – "are beneath true scholarship" (*PF*, 256).

K_1. It is K's discourse as an editor that provides the reader's first access to the novel.[65] On this level K, seated in "[a] wretched motor lodge" (28) somewhere in the American Midwest ("Cedarn, Utana" [29]), edits S's text (S_2), pens his Commentary & Foreword, and – as he acknowledges only in Index (314–15) – himself writes many of the variant stanzas to the poem. In this way, he emerges as the primary N not only with regard to $K_{2,3,4}$ (below), but also in relation to S_1, for it must be kept in mind that all information concerning the poet's "real life" comes to us *via* K's editorial voice. As the editor himself asserts in his Foreword, with less hyperbole than we might think:

> [104] Let me state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his [. . .] has to depend entirely on the reality of its author [. . .], *a reality that only my notes can provide.*
> (28–9; my emphasis)

K_2. This is the level inhabited by K as the hero of his own narrative. It encompasses the story of "the glorious friendship" (K's term [101]) between the two protagonists (cf. S_1 below), as well as the history of K's personal background as it was narrated by him to the poet (for references to the "inspiring evening stroll[s]" taken by S with his neighbor cf. 74–5, 80–1, 185–6 *passim*). As it transpires – or as the editor leads us to believe – K is not one of S's countrymen, but an Americanized refugee from a little-known North-European country called "Zembla" (e.g. 74: "[. . .] Zembla, my dear country [. . .]"): his main purpose in recounting his Zemblan past to the poet has been to make S use these materials in his verse (74–5, 80–2 *passim*). Consequently, K_2-level is seen to coincide with S's own level of reality at New Wye (in the sense that both K and S "live" inside it), while K himself functions both as the hero with regard to K_1 and as N in relation to the Zembla-narrative (K_3) with all its attendant levels of embedding (K_4).

K_3. The Zembla-narrative – told for its most part on K_2, although at least some new details are appended to the history by K still as an editor (cf. Index [307, 311]). This is in essence a straightforward story, based on the motifs of a revolution in a distant monarchy, the escape of its king, and a subsequent pursuit organized by a revolutionary organization named "Shadows". On the other hand, it becomes clear from the narrative that K's hidden intent as a teller has been to establish a direct link between his own person (K_2) and that of the escaped king (K_3): "Charles Kinbote" is himself "Charles Xavier the Beloved" (or "Charles II" [74, 306]), whose story hence emerges as an autobiography in a somewhat less than subtle disguise. (Cf. Index, where K advises his readers within a single entry to "see Charles II and Kinbote" [308]; he also signs one of his own interpolations into the story "C.X.K" [275]; addresses himself as "poor King, poor Kinbote" [300], etc.). It is mainly to make *this* connection "real" that K urges S to appropriate the Zemblan materials in his poem. As he in fact reports having told the poet during one of their strolls – here spelling out quite overtly the imaginary status of his story:

> [105] My dear John [. . .] do not worry about trifles. Once transmuted by you into poetry, the [Zemblan] stuff *will* be true, and the people *will* come alive.
> (214; K's emphasis)

K_4. Artifacts embedded within the Zembla-level: "*Historia Zemblica*" (studied by King Charles in his youth [110]); Uncle Conmal's Zemblan translation of *Timon of Athens* (80); the drama "*Merman*", performed at the Zemblan capital at the time of the king's escape (129); the king's letter to Queen Disa (cited on 257), etc. These are all materials that depend fully on K's voice on the outer levels of his narrative.

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65. Excluding the epigraph, taken from Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* and placed on the front leaf of *Pale Fire*. I take the epigraph to derive *from the author*, rather than from either of the two narrating agents. As S's biographer K evidently assumes the status of a parodic "Boswell". Further on in the narrative, he himself refers to *Life of Johnson* (cf. 154) and even reports that S carried a certain outward resemblance to Dr. Johnson (265).

S_1. It is on another level of the narrated reality altogether that S leads his life in the small college town of "New Wye, Appalachia, U.S.A." (13). The time is 1959 (13–14). On this level, he lives as K's neighbor (K_2 above), hears the yarns recounted by the latter ($K_{3,4}$), and produces his own "Pale Fire" (S_2), which at least on its surface turns out to have minimally little to do with the Zemblan topic (cf. K's lamentations on 296–7). It is on this level, in addition, that S dies from an assassin's bullet while putting his finishing touches to the poem (287–301), hence leaving K to do the final editing. He assumes in this sense the role of the biographic subject in relation to K's discourse, while remaining the sole N with regard to his own autobiographic discourse.

S_2. "Pale Fire" – composed by S during the last twenty days of his life (13, 74; cf. also ll. 980–1 of the poem: "[. . .] tomorrow, on July/The twenty-second, nineteen fifty-nine" [69]). The discourse in S_2 is autobiographic to the extent that it takes its main motifs from the poet's personal past – his childhood experiences, his marriage, or the fate of his daughter – but it is also indicated that portions of the story have been largely stylized (e.g. most names figuring in the text appear to be fabrications [18, 195, 223, 256, 290]; on 236 the entire poetic milieu is said to be "invented"). Hence we cannot regard the poem as a direct document of S_1. The same level also comprises other texts written by S and mentioned in the course of K's Commentary: "*The Sacred Tree*" (cited on 93); "*The Swing*" (94–5); "*Mountain View*" (115); "*The Nature of Electricity*" (192–3); "*April Rain*" (216); "*Mont Blanc*" (258); "*Art*" (284); or "*Supremely Blest*" (195), S's book on Alexander Pope.

S_3. Artifacts embedded within the framework of the poem: the newspaper clipping cited on ll. 97–8 (36); "Jim Coates's" article in a magazine on ll. 747–58 (60–1); the TV-shows viewed by S and his wife on the night of their daughter's death (ll. 404–74; 47–50).

OA (= Other Artifacts). In addition, other embedded texts exist within the "New Wye"-level of the narrated reality (i.e. S_1/K_2): excerpts from a psychiatric textbook read by K to his neighbor (271); reports of S's death published by the press (297); or an "Appreciation of John Shade's published works" (100–1) by one "Professor Hurley", a rivalling biographer, whose views are contemptuously treated by K throughout his Commentary (14, 18, 94–5, 268; cf. also Index: "Prof. H. contradicted and corrected" [308]).[66]

NOTE on "Zembla". The latter level introduces a problem, very characteristic of the narrative system in *Pale Fire*. For while it is on one hand suggested that the entire sequence of events ascribed to "Zembla" represents nothing if not a figment of K's frenzied imagination (K_3 above), at the same time artifacts containing references to the mythic kingdom keep cropping up on other levels of the narrative. On the very day that S is shot dead at New Wye, *The New York Times* is said to have carried an item on the Zemblan revolution (274), and also a related headline from an unnamed French paper is cited in the text: "L'EX-ROI DE ZEMBLA EST-IL À PARIS?" (149). What is more, "a magazine with the picture of the Royal Palace [in the Zemblan capital]" (24) circulates in the English literature office at Wordsmith College, where S teaches. An illustrated encyclopedia in the college library carries a photograph of the Zemblan monarch (268), and K's own resemblance to the deposed king is at one point discussed at the Wordsmith Faculty Club by S and his colleagues (265–9). Are we to assume, then, that Zembla itself is "real" in terms of the novelistic universe (in the same sense as "New Wye" or "Utana" are authentic localities in the framework of the novel)? Has K been appropriating actual sources in composing the tale of his royal background? Or are even these sources imaginary? There

66. The role given to Hurley's embedded text is comparable to that of Mr. Goodman's "*The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight*" in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (58–66, 108–11). In either instance, the primary N produces his biographic discourse as a reply to the falsified version of the subject's "real life". For VN's own summing-up of this aspect in the two novels cf. the above quote from *Look at the Harlequins!* in ex. [103]. In Vadim's work the bogus biography is assigned to Mr. "Godman" (*LH!*, 121).

may be no way of reaching a watertight decision on these points, but the problem is a real one for anyone reading the novel. Zembla either exists or does not exist apart from K's imagination.[67] As will be argued in this discussion, it is only when we have examined the precise creative control allotted to K over the comprehensive narrative, that we may speculate further on the degree of "authenticity" belonging to any of its individual levels.

NOTE on B (="*Botkin*"). Another problem, closely linked with the foregoing one, is caused by the presence of "*Botkin,* V., American scholar of Russian descent" (Index [306]) in the background of K's narrative. We are on occasion teased with the possibility that one further level may still exist in the novel: perhaps even the person of K as a real-life editor of the text has been invented by another narrative agent, who has left only some incidental markers of his identity in the discourse? (The most taunting of these is the overt surmise that the name "Kinbote" may in fact be "a kind of anagram of Botkin or Botkine" [267].) In this instance, the status of Zembla would again be reduced to that of a fantastic invention, supposedly kindled in the mind of the Russo-American Botkin by the loss of his own homeland (Zembla = Russia).[68]

On the other hand, this hypothesis is also destined to remain an unresolvable one. There is a great deal that we can say about the background and personality of K on the basis of the narrative (and a great deal will be said in the discussion that follows), but there is practically nothing that we may tell about his anagrammatic *alter ego.* One "Prof. Botkin" reportedly teaches Russian at Wordsmith College (155; K is said to be "teaching Zemblan" [248]), while no direct mention is made of his participation in the narrated history (for indirect references cf. also 100 and 220). Accordingly, I deem it legitimate to go on assigning the primary narrative voice in the novel to "Kinbote", although we may concede that beyond this level there lurks still another, unspecified identity (i.e. that of the apocryphal B: hence the dotted line instead of the solid one on the outer frame of our graph).[69]

The Problem of Rivalry

"Which Dreamed It?", queries Alice after her dream about the Red King (cf. above 3.2.1.). *Pale Fire,* as even a most schematic description of its fictive levels is bound to show, forces its reader to confront essentially the same question. When the protagonists within the novel are themselves constantly in the act of engendering new fictions, it

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67. We know, of course, that there exists a "real" Zembla outside the novel – the huge, largely uninhabited twin islands of *Novaja Zemlja,* located ca. 300 nautical miles north of the Russian mainland. The name has been traditionally transcribed into English as "Nova Zembla". In *Speak, Memory* the author tells that one of his ancestors actually took part "in an expedition to map Nova Zembla (of all places)" (52; cf. also Index to *SM:* "Nova Zembla, *see* Novaya" [215]). In *Pale Fire* K expressly warns against confusing himself "with some refugee from Nova Zembla" (267). All this does not mean, however, that the kingdom of Zembla *couldn't* exist as an autonomous narrative fact within the novel. Cf. also below n. 87.

68. There are certain unmistakably Slavic elements in the language and nomenclature used throughout K's Commentary. Some of these will be listed below in notes 83, 85–6, 89, 92.

69. Should we mention that there also exists a real "Prof. Botkin"? The American folklorist B.A. Botkin (1901–1975) has edited, among many other similar collections, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore* (1949). Opening the Index-section of this work we find a rather intriguing mention of "King, Charles" (BOTKIN 1949, 765) – but the reference is merely to one of the many sources interviewed for Botkin's book: "Charles King" from Cary, N.C. (cf. *ibid,* 454). It is conceivable (though hardly provable) that VN went through some of Botkin's materials while working on his novel, and a number of other shadow-affinities between these collections and *Pale Fire* could easily be pointed out. But none of these would throw light on the question of "Botkin's" role *inside the novel.* "Such humdrum potterings", and so forth.

becomes difficult for us to decide which of the rivalling "dreamers" should finally be regarded as the main one.

This problem has been repeatedly debated by critics – an entire legion of them – during the two decades since the first publication of *Pale Fire*. Many of the enigmas buried in the narrative plot were exposed already in the pioneering survey by MCCARTHY (1962), printed on both sides of the Atlantic almost immediately after the novel came out. It is due to her analysis that we know how to regard K's manipulations of the Zembla-narrative, and we know better than to take in earnest the hints thrown in about his royal ancestry. We know who "really" shot S, despite K's disclaimers. We have learned to think of K himself as a deranged scholar, who freely indulges in his private fantasies while reeling out the editorial annotations. And we are ready to suspect the invisible presence of the Russian "Botkin" behind K's well-prepared discursive mask. (In presenting my own schematization in *Fig. 4* above, I have appropriated McCarthy's findings; cf. esp. the first half of her essay [1962, 15–19 *passim*].)

These points have been developed further during the past twenty years of *Pale Fire* scholarship – indeed, with *Lolita* and *Ada*, the novel has proved to be VN's most discussed single text.[70] As regards the problem of rivalry between its principal narrative agents, the following three positions have been advanced.

(i) *K = "Author"*. This reading was first put forward by STEGNER (1966). Because K resides on the outermost level of the narrative as a fictive editor, he is taken to have literally "authored" all its inner fictions. In Stegner's own formulation:

> [. . .] it is [. . .] possible, perhaps probable, that Gradus and Shade are as much figments of Kinbote's imagination as Charles the Beloved and the far-distant land of Zembla. [. . .] If [K] is able to dream up an Arabian Nights tale of his royal life in [the Zemblan capital] and populate that [. . .] city with several dozen fantastic, though imaginary, personalities, he is certainly able to dream up John and Sybil Shade and their daughter Hazel, and create a fictitious poem as well.
> (129–30)

Few subsequent critics have gone along with this reasoning as such,[71] but a more subtle

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70. This is the place to list the most important secondary sources published on *Pale Fire*. The article by McCarthy was printed both in *New Republic* and in the British *Encounter*. A French version appears in the 1964 Nabokov issue of *L'Arc* (MICHA 1964a, 7–22). In addition, we should mention at least the following: KERMODE 1962; C. WILLIAMS 1963; LEE 1964, 228–36 and 1976, 132–44; ROVET 1966; STEGNER 1966, 116–32; LYONS 1967; FIELD 1967, 106–13, 291–322. It would seem that in many cases these early studies were inspired as much by McCarthy's suggestions as by the actual novel (notwithstanding the unexpected claim by FIELD that, in her exegetical zeal, she "managed to miss the point of the whole thing" [1966, 5]; for a reply cf. MCCARTHY 1966). The second wave of *Pale Fire* scholarship includes BERBEROVA 1970b; BADER 1972, 31–56; FOWLER 1974, 91–121; SPROWLES 1974; MORTON 1974, 104–27; ROTH 1975; WALKER 1976; HYDE 1977, 171–91; GRABES 1977, 54–69; LEVINE 1978; COUTURIER 1979, 107–12; JOHNSON 1979c; PIFER 1980, 110–18; EDELSTEIN 1982; WRIGHT 1982; MADDOX 1983, 14–34. To my mind the most insightful single reading is that by ALTER 1975b, 180–217. I shall be returning to these, as well as to some other, studies in the course of my discussion.

71. Stegner tries to strengthen his thesis with a suggestion that "[. . .] while Kinbote *says* he is in a secluded mountain cabin in Cedarn, Utana, he complains about an amusement park outside

version has been later suggested by JOHNSON (1979c). According to his theory, it is not K but the enigmatic "V. Botkin" who is responsible for all levels inside the novel: B is himself a narrative agent who is "writing a novel about the entirely fictional characters Kinbote, Shade, and Gradus" (46). Hence there is only one "author" in the narrative, while there may still be several invented speakers. As we notice, in either instance an attempt is made to render the novel comprehensible by *reducing* its narrative complexity – either by assigning all embedded levels to a single voice, or by construing still one additional level inside which all others can again be conveniently placed.[72]

(ii) *S = "Author"*. The result is in effect the same if we accept the second reading, initially proposed by FIELD (1967; 1977, 28) as an antidote to (i). In Field's view, it is S who has invented K, whereas "V. Botkin [. . .] is the secondary Nabokovian agent who was the real person out of whom Shade fashioned Kinbote" (1967, 314; cf. also 299–300, 317–18). As a proof for this thesis he proffers the fact – if it is one – that "a sane man [=S] may invent an insane character [=K]", while the reverse is not possible (1967, 317). His proposal has been taken up e.g. by BADER (whose whole discussion relies on it [1972, 31–56]); RUSSELL (1974, 357); TANNER (1976, 36); and in a more far-fetched form by JANEWAY, who claims that "Kinbote is Shade's mad ghost, attempting in his commentary to carry on the unfinished task and write the last line of Shade's poem" (1967, 71).[73]

(iii) *The Straightforward Reading.* According to the third view, the principal narrative agents retain their separate identities. S is the author of the poem and K is the author of Commentary, Foreword and Index, while a number of mysterious linkages exist between the embedded and embedding levels in the narrative. Because of the latter propensity it is often assumed that neither of the two agents is in full control over his own discourse: the novel as a whole is taken to promote the presence of an extra-fictive "author" – VN himself – actively manipulating the narrative behind the backs of his protagonists. (E.g. the argument by APPEL that "[the] a-novelistic components of [*Pale Fire*] – Foreword, Poem, Commentary, and Index – create [. . .] a closed cosmos that can be only of the author's making, rather than the product of an 'unreliable' narrator" [1967b, 27–8; 1970a, xxix].)[74]

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his window. *Perhaps his seclusion is being enforced by the walls of an asylum*" (1966, 130; the first emphasis is in the text, the second is mine). The asylum theory is also put forward by C. WILLIAMS 1963 and BERBEROVA 1970b, 152. On the other hand, these critics overlook the entirely plausible motivation given to K's complaints elsewhere in the novel: "At first I was greatly bothered by the blare of diabolical radio music from what I thought was some kind of amusement park across the road – it turned out to be camping tourists [. . .]" (*PF*, 235).

72. Johnson first offers his theory as a mere hypothesis, but later he talks of having it "firmly established and verified" (1979c, 47). Earlier C. WILLIAMS had also suggested that both S and K are "actually [. . .] aspects of one person" (1963, 33).

73. Among more recent investigators, ROWE (1981, 26–32) is again the main proponent of the "ghost" reading, although he does not give much heed to the problem of narrative levels. According to Rowe, *every* level in the narrative is populated by ghosts. I have claimed earlier that *Transparent Things* is the sole Nabokovian novel where the properly narrating agent may be considered to be "dead". Cf. above 2.4.

74. Cf. also LEE on given sections in the narrative: "We cannot doubt that this is Nabokov talking about his own work" (1964, 236; 1976, 144); as well as WRIGHT 1982, 281–2.

It is hardly my purpose here to offer a definitive "solution" to the novel – to my mind *Pale Fire* is not a crossword puzzle to be solved, though some of its early critics tended to regard it mainly as such. But I would not agree with the view of those critics either who have been of the mind that no solution at all exists for the narrative ambiguities contained in the novel.[75]

In the main, I shall be opting for the "straight" alternative (i.e. [iii]), although we shall also see that the narrative forces us to make several qualifications. The central point to be observed has been lucidly put in a formulation by ALTER:

> Exegetes of [*Pale Fire*] [. . .] have tended to complicate it in gratuitous ways by publishing elaborate diagrams of its structure [. . .]. This is not a Jamesian experiment in reliability of narrative point-of-view, and there is no reason to doubt the existence of the basic fictional data – the Poem and its author, on the one hand, and the mad Commentary and *its* perpetrator on the other, inverted left hand.
> (1975b, 185–6; emphasis in the text)

In other words (although we may not be quite convinced about the gratuity of "diagrams"), one can do better than promote unprovable theses concerning "authorship" in the novel (K inventing S, S inventing K on the basis of B, B inventing both S and K, etc.). The proper question to ask when studying *Pale Fire* is not merely *Who speaks?*, but also the more distinctively Nabokovian one: *Who is responsible for the correlations* hidden between the narrative levels?

Before starting with the correlations, I propose to take up one example – the question of the novel's title – encapsuling within itself the basic problem that we are here attempting to elucidate.

> "Some moondrop title [. . .] *Pale Fire*" (l. 962; 68)

The literary source of S's chosen title is by now well known, and the relevant lines from *Timon of Athens* have been often cited in criticism:[76]

> [. . .] I'll example you with thievery:
> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun,
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears. The earth's a thief
> That feeds and breeds by composture stol'n
> From general excrement [. . .]
> (quoted from MCCARTHY 1962, 32 and BERBEROVA 1970b, 154)

A "metatext" in the true sense of the term, this excerpt turns out to comment on manifold aspects of the surrounding narrative. The notions of "thievery" and "reflection"

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75. The phrasing by MCCARTHY has become classic: "Each [. . .] level [in *Pale Fire*] proves to be a false bottom; there is an infinite perspective regression, for the book is a book of mirrors" (1962, 19). Cf. also e.g. ROVET 1966, 2280; MORTON 1974, 121; COUTURIER 1978, 166 and 1979, 111; WRIGHT 1982, 274.

76. Cf. MCCARTHY 1962, 32. C. WILLIAMS (1963, 35) adds that a reference to "pale fire" also occurs in *Hamlet*, but this is clearly a secondary connection. Other remarks on the allusion are provided by BADER 1972, 43; BERBEROVA 1970b, 154–5; ALTER 1975b, 205–7.

– a reflection stealing its light from some brighter sphere – are operative on each of the principal levels in the novel. These will be briefly enumerated.

(i) *S.* Why does S, after all, choose to name his discourse "Pale Fire"? Not only because of "the fashionable device of entitling [. . .] a long poem [. . .] with a phrase lifted from a more or less celebrated poetical work of the past" (240), as K suggests at one instance, but also because the title proves relevant to the thematics of the embedded text as such.[77] Ample use is made of the reflection-trope throughout the poem. The motif figures already in the opening lines of Canto One, with their mention of a "false azure in the windowpane" (cf. ll. 1–4; 33); it recurs e.g. in S's recollection of "strange/ Nacreous gleams beyond the adult's range" perceived in his childhood (ll. 633–4; 56), or in his vision of nameless "gods" controlling human existence: "It did not matter who they were. No sound,/No furtive light came from their involute/Abode" (ll. 816–18; 63). The deeper thematic motivation behind the trope is overtly propounded in the third canto: there exists a higher transcendental order beyond the level of one's everyday reality, perceivable mainly in the networks of "coincidence" ("accidents and possibilities" [l. 829; 63]) that appear in the texture of individual lives (for the total conception cf. ll. 803–29; 62–3). Such intimations of another world (i.e. its "reflections"), S further asserts, become comprehensible only when transformed into patterns of verbal art (esp. ll. 963–84; 68–9). It is this particular credo that underlies S's effort to write the story of his own life in a poetic form.

(ii) *K.* In K's editorial discourse, the trope is put to a number of additional uses. It figures on the plane of the embedded Zembla-narrative – e.g. under the guise of "the weak gleam of a moonbeam" (111) observed by King Charles on the shoulder of his first bride, or as a reflected light on her earrings ("[. . .] catching and losing the fire of the sun" [105]). There are overt references to the Shakespearean subtext in Zemblan place names – "Timon Alley" (126) – and K even claims to have with him a Zemblan version of the play ("*Timon Afinsken*" [79–80 *passim*]) while composing his Commentary.[78]

At the same time, the motif is used by K to accentuate his claim that S's poem is itself a "reflection", borrowing its primary materials from the narrative recounted to the poet by his Zemblan neighbor (i.e. on K_2). What K expressly promises to do in his editorial discourse is to sort out all "echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints" (297) in the poem that he thinks refer to Zembla. He also acknowledges, at a more sober moment, that "in its pale and diaphanous final phase [S_2] cannot be regarded

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77. This despite the assertion by FIELD that "the title [. . .] has absolutely no relevance to Shade's poem taken by itself" (1967, 298).

78. The purpose of this claim being, of course, to further enhance the connection between the Zemblan monarch and the editor's own person. Reporting on King Charles's escape from the palace K tells that the fugitive took with him an unidentified object "as a talisman" (132). Earlier it has been indicated that the fake closet from which the escape started was "empty [. . .] save for [a] tiny volume of *Timon Afinsken*" (128). And in another connection K's own possession of "a tiny vest pocket edition" (285) of the play is announced. Given all these manipulations inside K's discourse, it is difficult for me to accept the critics' claim that he "does not recognize" the *Timon* allusion in S's poem. For this claim cf. e.g. KERMODE 1962, 671; COUTURIER 1978, 169 and 1979, 110; ROWE 1981, 41.

as a direct echo of [his] narrative" (81); evokes "the pale fire of the incinerator" (15) in S's backyard, where he believes the poet burned those variants that contained the authentic text; or laments: "vainly does one look in *Pale Fire* (oh, pale indeed!) for the warmth of my hand gripping yours, poor Shade!" (177). From the editorial standpoint, then, the title becomes motivated in suggesting the subordinate status of S's creation to that of K, and it is to prove this thesis that the writing of the Commentary is undertaken.

(iii) *Pale Fire.* On the plane of the comprehensive novel, finally, the title operates in the role of a controlling metaphor, tying together a wealth of compositional strands. Most obviously, K's discourse may also be regarded as subordinated to S's poem. In a quite literal sense of the term, his act of editing the text exemplifies "thievery", for he has confiscated the dead poet's manuscript (16–17, 298–9). Moreover, it is evident that in composing his discourse K borrows several elements directly from S: he himself admits to "unconsciously aping the prose style of [S's] critical essays" (81), or even to "borrowing a kind of opalescent light from [the] poet's fiery orb" (*ibid*). In still another instance it is revealed that he was habitually derided by S's wife as an "elephantine tick: a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius" (171–2) – which once more harks back in a most condemning fashion to the afore-cited Shakespearean notion of "breed[ing] by composture stol'n/From general excrement".

It is the latter relationship that has received the attention of those critics who see in *Pale Fire* mainly a lampoon of "academic" literary scholarship.[79] This, to be sure, is one aspect of the novel, but alone it hardly enables us to comprehend the full scope of the narrative play. Surely K does more than just imitate his biographic subject. For the sake of determining the true nature of his enterprise we must now look in some detail into the internal linkages hidden within the comprehensive system.

The System of Inter-Level Correlations

Pale Fire develops (to a degree that is almost absurd) the Nabokovian concern with "correlations" between disparate elements (Introduction [0.4.]). Within the novelistic universe each of the separate levels describes a search for hidden linkages: S keeps seeking for "Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind/Of correlated pattern in the game" (ll. 812–13, 63) on the level of his own life; K seeks to establish a relationship between his personal life-history and S's poem; and the novel as a whole promotes still another pattern, which is left for the reader to decipher on his own. In Russian Formalist parlance, this would be a prime instance of "construction made palpaple" (*oshchushchaemaja konstrukcija* [e.g. TYNJANOV 1924, 14]). The following are examples of this compositional principle.

$K_2 \leftrightarrow K_3$

It seems safest to begin with the more obvious instances and then proceed to the problematic ones. Precisely as S draws freely on his everyday reality at New Wye in

79. E.g. MACDONALD refers to "Kinbote's academic rape of Shade's poem" (1962, 442).

choosing materials for his poem (below [xviii]–[xix]), so also aspects of K's real-life situation continuously turn up as particulars of the Zembla-epic.[80]

(i) *Motifs of Homosexuality.* K is a homosexual. This can be inferred from his activities on K_2-level (23, 24–5, 26–7, 93, 98, 228 and *passim*) as well as from their continuation on K_1 (e.g. the mention of "the little angler, a honey-skinned lad [. . .] frequently fed with nougat and nuts [. . .]" on 309); and the same clearly holds true for "King Charles" on K_3-level of the narrative. In fact, several hints are given in the text that the entire history of Zembla may derive mainly from K's own fears of exposure in his academic community (cf. the references to his "secret", divulging a different sense on each level of embedding [24–5, 214–15, 288].) On the other hand, no psychoanalysis of the protagonist is necessary for drawing these connections,[81] for K's thwarthed desires are overtly reflected on the plane of his fantasy – not only in King Charles's grotesque romps ("a whole mountain of gift boys [. . .] piled three or four deep" [111]), but also in details pertaining to the Zemblan landscape. The capital of this country is dubbed "Uranograd" (102), purportedly after one of the king's predecessors ("Uran the Last" [246]), but more plausibly deriving from *uranism,* the clinical term for homosexuality.[82] Consider also Zemblan topography: "The Bera Range, an erection of veined stone and shaggy firs, rose before me" (259). Or the following: "Everywhere along the road powerful temptations stood at attention" (208).

(ii) *Campus-Motifs.* Similarly, K's personal grudges against real-life acquaintances from Wordsmith Campus are reflected in his chronicle (despite the claim on 297 that he "[has] done [his] best not to air any grievances"). "Our professed Shadeans" (14), meaning the group of S's colleagues at Wordsmith who have dared to question K's integrity as a scholar, reoccur on K_3 as "the group of especially devout Extremists calling themselves the Shadows" (150). It is the latter clique that keeps pursuing the exiled king and later sends the assassin Gradus on his mission (cf. below [iv]). Their leader, identified by his "green velvet jacket" (255) and punningly dubbed "Izumrudov" (*ibid*), turns out to resemble one of K's worst foes at the campus: "a young instructor in a green velvet jacket, whom I shall mercifully call Gerald Emerald" (24).[83] K's ultimate sally on the

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80. It is indicated in the text that "Zembla" is mainly a product of K's telling on K_2-level, narrated for the benefit of his neighbor. But it also becomes clear that the composition goes on still on K_1 – as when K refers in his Index to "a rosy-cheeked goose-boy [. . .] *only now distinctly recalled by the writer*" (307; my emphasis), or specifies the activities of another Zemblan resident with a humorous qualification: "[. . .] when last seen in this Index" (311). APPEL errs in attributing the Index-section directly to "the authorial voice" (1967b, 32). For a related error cf. BADER 1972, 45.

81. In a detailed paper, ROTH has treated K as an instance of "a paradigmatic Oedipal dilemma" (1975, 225), but this is to my mind overstating the case. We should note that both K and S indulge in overt lampoons of Freud in their respective discourses (S: ll. 929–30; 67; K: 271).

82. Humbert Humbert uses it: "I sat with uranists in the Deux Magots" (*L,* 18).

83. Noticeably, the "real" name is hence revealed to be K's fabrication. *Izumrud* corresponds to the Russian 'jewel', or 'emerald'. In addition, "Herald's Hall" (120) where King Charles is imprisoned after the Extremist revolution may derive from "Gerald". The Cyrillic *g* and *h* are often made interchangeable in transliteration (e.g. '*German*' = 'Hermann', etc.).

Shadow chief relates to either level:

> [106] The gay green vision withdrew – to resume his whoring no doubt. How one hates such men!
> (256)

"Hal", one of King Charles's Extremist guards on K_3 (128), may well derive his name from the anonymous note slipped into K's pocket by Emerald during a campus fête: "You have hal . . . . . s real bad, chum" (98). Another insult dealt by Emerald – nicknaming K "the Great Beaver" (24) – finds a counterpart in "Beverland Hotel" (276), where Gradus stays on the eve of his flight to New Wye. The king's boy-lover "Gordon" (199), said to be a "musical prodigy" (200), may be modelled on "Assistant Professor Misha Gordon, a red-haired musician" (216), once treated as a house guest by K (229). And also K's refusal to lecture in a women's club on the subject of "The Hally Vally" (25) is commemorated on the level of Zembla. According to K, the garbled title confuses "Odin's Hall with the title of a Finnish epic" (*ibid*) – that is *Kalevala* – and its further twistings include "Odevalla" (138), the name of a Zemblan town, as well as the cognomen given to one of the king's henchmen: "Odon" (120).

(iii) "*The Goldsworthian château*" (19). Motifs pertaining to K's stay at Judge Goldsworth's residence reoccur elsewhere in a deceptively Zemblan garb. He is himself fond of referring to "[his] rented castle" (20, 97, 183, 216). It is further indicated that the clothes closet in the rented house may have sparked the lengthy "escape through the tunnel" episode taking place in King Charles's castle (124–34, 295). The recurring references to Fleur de Fyler, the king's first bride, specifically in terms of felines (105, 112) may well hark back to the Goldsworth cat, which K is supposed to look after during his stay (84, 109–12). A portrait of the judge's youngest daughter – called "Alphina" (84) – has clearly affected the portrayal of King Charles's own father, "Alfin the Vague" (101).[84] Even the bare existence of "[a] slit for discarded safety blades" (84) in the Goldsworth bathroom is later repeated under a humorous guise: "*zhiletka* blades" (99) are purportedly sold at Zembla at the time of the Extremist revolution.[85] (For another occurrence of the motif cf. [vii].)

(iv) "*Grey*"/"*d'Argus*"/"*Gradus*". Importantly, the real-life identity of "Jakob Gradus" (77 *passim*) is also disclosed by K in his remarks on the Goldsworthian household. Rummaging among his landlord's belongings, K says, he once came across an album, containing pictures of criminals sent to prison by the judge:

> [107] [. . .] unforgettable faces of imbecile hoodlums, last smokes and last grins, a strangler's quite ordinary-looking hands, a self-made widow, the close-set merciless eyes of a homicidal maniac (somewhat resembling, I admit, the late Jacques d'Argus) [. . .]
> (83)

The latter reference contains a link with the subsequent mention of "[the] snake-sad,

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84. What is more, the span of Alfin's life – 45 years ("1873–1918" [101]) – equals the combined age of the four Goldsworth daughters (9+10+12+14 [cf. 83]).

85. This is once more a punning derivation, combining the well-known brand name "Gillette" and a diminutive of the Russian *zhilet* ('waistcoat'). In Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* VN himself terms *zhiletka* "a dreadful vulgarism" brought about by "Soviet provincialization" (*EO* 2, 106).

close-set eyes" (294) belonging to S's real-life killer. It is only in connection with the actual shooting scene that K proceeds to comment on reports given of the poet's death in the press: rather than a Zemblan regicide called "Gradus" ("d'Argus"), the gunman was in fact a common criminal named "Jack Grey", who had escaped from the Institute for the Criminal Insane for the express purpose of murdering Judge Goldsworth (for bits and pieces of this version cf. 284, 295, 299). S's death was a mere accident caused by his close resemblance to the judge (cf. 267). That the "Grey" and "Gradus" -versions of the same incident are mutually exclusive is recognized by K, of course, and he keeps denying to the end all reports of "the terrifying shadows that Judge Goldsworth's gown threw across the underworld" (85), or of "this or that beast lying in prison and positively dying of [. . .] thirst for revenge" (*ibid*). According to him, such stories are:

> [108] [. . .] crass banalities circulated by the scurrilous and the heartless – by all those for whom romance, remoteness, sealskin-lined scarlet skies, the darkening dunes of a fabulous kingdom, simply do not exist.
> (85)

This is one of the key passages in the novel, and we shall yet have occasion to take it up again. (For other occurrences of "Gradus" cf. above [ii]; below [vi], [viii], [xix], [xx].)

$OA \longleftrightarrow K_3$

In an analogous manner, other embedded artifacts (comparable to Goldsworth's album) on the plane of K's life at New Wye may be reflected in his Zembla-epic.

(v) An item quoted by K from *The New York Times* – "The Helman brothers said they had assisted in the negotiations for the placement of a sizable note: $ 11,000,000, Decker Glass Manufacturing Company, Inc." (275) – suspiciously correlates with the beginning of the Zemblan revolution in "the famous Glass Factory" (120) or with Gradus's attendant predilection for objects made of "glass" (below [xii]).[86] Another ad in the same paper finds its counterpart on K_3 in the recurrent motif of "crown jewels". Compare (ix) below and the "Emerald/Izumrudov" -complex in (ii) above: "The Rachel Jewelry Company in Brooklyn advertised in agate type for a jewelry polisher who 'must have experience on costume jewelry' " (275).

K_3

Zemblan, one is told, is "the tongue of the mirror" (246). Furthermore, we are led to believe that the name of K's mythic homeland is not derived "[from] the Russian *zemlya,* but from Semberland, a land of reflections, or 'resemblers' " (265). In this sense it is only to be expected that in evoking his Zemblan past K persists in creating ever new correlations *within* the verbal universe of K_3. What results is a world where – as in the universe of another Nabokovian novel – "everybody is merely an anagram of everybody else" (Introduction to *BS,* xi).

(vi) "Jakob Gradus" appears, among other anagrammatic guises, (above [iv]), as "Sudarg

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86. Elsewhere in the novel the correlations are multiplied *ad absurdum:* the triplicate zeroes are echoed in the names of three New Wye lakes – "Omega", "Ozero" (= 'lake' [Russ.]), and "Zero" (92) – and also S's poem, according to K, was to have altogether "1000" lines (292).

of Bokay" (111), elsewhere identified as a Zemblan "mirror maker of genius" (314). "Odon" ([ii] above) is a simple palindromic variant of his evil half-brother "Nodo" (150), either of them being alphabetically incorporated into the name of the former's mother "Sylvia O'Donnell" (247), *née* "O'Connell" (311). "Fleur de Fyler" (105) is another approximate anagram. The two barons "Radomir" and "Mirador" Mandevil (Index [310]) are placed in a spooneristic relationship, and a bilingual transposition links King Charles's two tutors: "Monsieur Beauchamp" and "Mr. Campbell" (126). Alliterative mirrorings are seen e.g. in the name of the king's grandfather "Thurgus the Third" (121); in "Bregsberg" (138); or in "Blenda" (123), "Embla" (138), "Emblem Bay" (212), and "Zembla". The same tendency towards verbal linkages and punning will crop up again in connection with S's own poem (below [xxii]).

$K_3 \longleftrightarrow S_2$

From correlations engendered solely by K, we move on to the relationship between the two narrating agents. It is, we must keep in mind, precisely this relationship that furnishes the main reason for K's Commentary in the first place. He himself refers to the "underside of the weave" (81) in S's poem: the hidden network of markers from which the dependence of the poem upon K's Zembla-epic may be inferred. And even if our initial response towards K's offerings is bound to be more than sceptical (e.g. his efforts in [viii] below), it will also turn out that there may be more to the underside of either discourse than at first meets the reader's eye.

(vii) "*Zembla*"

> [109] And while the safety blade with a scrape and screak
> Travels across the country of my cheek,
> [. . .] I plough
> *Old Zembla's fields* where my gray stubble grows,
> And slaves make hay between my mouth and nose.
> (ll. 931–2, 936–8; 67; my emphasis)

This curious image is the sole mention of "Zembla" in the whole of S_2. We might expect the editor to literally pounce upon it, but the reference is soon shown to be a deceptive one. As K will learn – to his considerable chagrin – the image does not derive from his narrative, but from a fully public source. The relevant line from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* is cited in a footnote to the poem by S himself,[87] who would here seem to be signalling the total autonomy of his text from yarns concocted by his neighbor.

It *is* curious, on the other hand, that the less obtrusive motif of "shaving" in ex.

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87. I.e. "At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where" (cited on 272). The allusion is a motivated one from S's own point of view, as he is the author of an entire scholarly work on Pope (l. 384; 46; 195). Previous investigators of *Pale Fire* have pointed out that the "Zembla"-motif was common currency in eighteenth-century English literature. It occurs in *Tristram Shandy* (C. WILLIAMS 1963, 45), Swift's *The Battle of Books* (MERIVALE 1967, 214), and Pope's *Dunciad* (HYDE 1977, 172). In addition, we find a short piece by O. Henry entitled "The Prisoner of Zembla" (O. HENRY 1937), likewise telling of an imaginary kingdom, but it is improbable that this text serves any allusive function within either S's or K's discourse.

[109] also harks back to Zembla. The good biographer that he is, K fills in the fact that on the plane of his real life the poet used for his daily shaves "an ancient Gillette" (269), which once more connects with the above mention of "*zhiletka* blades" encountered by the king at Zembla during his escape (above [iii]). What is more, S's killer will later commit suicide "by slitting his throat open with a safety razor blade" (299) – hence bringing together motifs belonging alternatively to the levels of S_1 and S_2, K_2 as well as K_3.

(viii) "*Gradus*"/"*gradual*"/"*gray*". "And then the gradual and dual blue" (l. 17; 33); "All colors made me happy: even gray" (l. 29; 34). K's joint comment on these lines is responsible for a whole set of cross-references between S's poem and the Zemblan reality:

> [110] By an extraordinary coincidence (inherent perhaps in the contrapuntal nature of Shade's art) our poet seems to name here (gradual, gray) a man, whom he was to see for one fatal moment three weeks later, but of whose existence at the time [. . .] he could not have known.
> (77)

And from here on, the reader, too, will be on the lookout for even the most improbable occurrences of "Gradus" in S_2. Such purely alphabetic instances range from the recurrent "gradual" (ll. 17 and 209) or "gray" (ll. 29, 475, 604, 937) to S's mention of "snubbing [. . .] the big G" (l. 549; 53) – which from *his* viewpoint indicates merely the habit of capitalizing the word "god" (cf. 223–7) – or his note on being "whipped by the bough,/ tripped by the stump" (ll. 128–9; 37), which receives an unexpectedly prophetic sense from K's announcement that " 'tree' in Zemblan is *grados*" (93). Elsewhere, the killer's pseudonymous alias as "Jack Degree" (from "de Grey" [77]) is again verbally reflected in the text of the poem (cf. l. 728: "shade" = "degree" [60]). Compare also the seemingly innocuous pairing of "Tana*gra*" and "*dus*t" in one of S's variants (231; my emphasis). K's comment well indicates the urgency of his efforts:

> [111] 'Simple chance!' the pedestrian reader may cry. But let him try to see, as I have tried to see, how many such combinations are possible and plausible. 'Lenin*grad us*ed to be Petrograd?' 'A pri*g rad* (obs. past tense of read) *us*?'
> (231; K's emphases)

(ix) *Crown Jewels.* Jewel-imagery pervades S's poem. He e.g. illustrates the paradoxes of afterlife with a metaphoric reference to "[. . .] earrings from the other's jewel case" (l. 587; 55); mentions "bits of colored light/[. . .] offering gems" (ll. 612–14; 56); or singles out "An empty emerald case, squat and frog-eyed/Hugging the trunk" (ll. 238–9; 41), apparently indicating the emerald-green cocoon of a hatched insect. On the plane of K_3 this links with the elaborate saga of the Zemblan "crown jewels" (begun on 129 and continued still in Index) as well as with the series of "Izumrudov"/"Gerald Emerald" correlations threaded throughout the narrative (above [ii] and [v]). What is being accomplished here is the transference of a motif originating in K_2 *via* K_3 to S_2 and back again.

(x) *The Figure Eight.* Another series of recurrent imagery is constituted by references to emblematic "eights" within S_2: "The miracle of a lemniscate left/Upon wet sand by nonchalantly deft/Bicycle tires [. . .]" (ll. 137–9; 37); "[The] slender rubber band/ Which always forms, when dropped, an ampersand" (ll. 533–4; 53); "The boy was picked up at a quarter past/Eight" (ll. 389–90; 47); "A quartet of bores,/[. . .] would

debate/The Cause of Poetry on Channel 8" (ll. 410–12; 47). The series of recurrences is complete enough in itself.[88] But it receives a new motivation when K later tells of a Zemblan actress called "Iris Acht" (122), who died in "1888" (*ibid*), had a secret liaison with the king's grandfather "in the mid-Eighties" (314), and arranged the clandestine meetings with her lover in a tunnel that measured exactly "1,888 yards" (127). Compare also the following switch back to S_1/K_2: "[. . .] to quote Matthew Arnold 1822–1888 [. . .]" (294).

(xi) *Ice Hole, Mites and Bears.*

> [112] The lake lay in the mist, its ice half drowned.
> A blurry shape stepped off the reedy bank
> Into a crackling, gulping swamp, and sank.
> (ll. 498–500; 51)

The description of Hazel Shade's suicide in S_2 finds a burlesque variant in K's Index where "Queen Yaruga" is said to have "drowned in an ice-hole with her Russian lover during traditional New Year's festivities" (315). This also correlates with the portrayal of the watchman discovering Hazel's body as "Father Time" (l. 475; 50); Hazel has herself appeared as "Mother Time" (l. 312; 44) in a school play during Christmas festivities at New Wye. A rather similar correlation is engendered when S ponders in his poem on the possibilities of reincarnation:

> [113] [. . .] what to do
> On suddenly discovering that you
> Are now [. . .]
> [. . .] a bear cup beneath a burning pine,
> Or a book mite in a revived divine.
> (ll. 561–3, 565–6; 54)

As K explains elsewhere, one of King Charles's former tutors took an express interest in "book mites" and "bear hunting" (104).

(xii) *Windows and Reflections.* S's poem opens with a reference to windows, glass surfaces, and deceptive reflections (ll. 1–7; 33). Compare also below (xiii) and (xxi). In Zembla, the revolution begins in the Glass Factory (above [v]), and Gradus later shows a marked predilection for "glass" (77, 150, 251). The frequently-mentioned "stained-glass windows" in King Charles's palace (121, 296, 312) conjoin the same series (cf. also S_2: "[. . .] a glint of stained/Windows" [ll. 752–3; 61]). At one phase of his escape the king sees himself as a "scarlet reflection" (143) on the surface of a pool; Fleur de Fyler sees herself multiplied *ad infinitum* in the king's tripartite dressing-room mirror (111–12); and Hazel Shade sees herself dressed in her mother's fur coat: "[it] made/Her almost fetching; and the mirrors smiled" (ll. 360–1; 46).

(xiii) *Azure:* one of the key motifs in the novel (above [xii]; below [xxi]). The emblematic bird in the opening lines of the poem is slain specifically because of "the false azure in the windowpane" (l. 2; 33) – i.e. because it mistakes a "reflection" for

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88. Both a "lemniscate" and an "ampersand" suggest an eight. ALTER (1975b, 189) has pointed out that the recurring figure eight neatly captures also the bipartite shape of the actual novel (Poem+Commentary).

"reality". The motif is recapitulated by S when he tells that prior to her suicide Hazel Shade stopped for a while "Before the azure entrance" (l. 337; 47) of a glass-framed restaurant. K, for his part, again applies the motif for the purposes of his Zembla narrative: on his way to the fatal confrontation with S at New Wye, Gradus is said to have first landed at "the Côte d'Azur airport" (250). He later takes up residence in "Hotel Lazuli" (*ibid*).[89]

$K_2 \longleftrightarrow S_2$

Besides materials connected with Zembla, K insists on having furnished the poet with several other sources of literary inspiration.

(xiv) Recounting his daughter's childhood, S mentions that she "twisted words: pot, top/Spider, redips" (ll. 347–8; 45). This immediately calls forth K's claim that in fact "it was [he] who one day [. . .] observed [. . .] that 'spider' in reverse is 'redips' " (193). Elsewhere he reports his retort to Sybil Shade, purportedly made just before S's lines were written: "Please, dip or redip, spider, into this book" (162).[90] In a similar manner, he suggests that his games of "word golf" with S (262) may have generated some of the verbal games occurring in the actual poem. (Cf. below [xxii]; one of these games is threaded throughout K's Index [310 *passim*].)

$K_2 \longleftrightarrow S_1$

More outrageously, K keeps insisting on affinities between S's biography and that of his own.

(xv) In connection with S's birthday, K drops the singular piece of information that "it was [his] birthday too" (161). Later, in speculating on the possibility of ending his days after the editorial task is finished, he further mentions that this might take place in a hotel room numbered either "1915" or "1959" (220), which rather patly conjoins his own birth-year (or that of "King Charles" [cf. 306]) and the year when S himself lost his life. S's daughter also "took her poor young life" (l. 493; 50), and K's announcement that "Hazel Shade resembled [him] in certain respects" (193) appears as another hint that he intends to follow her example.[91]

$K_1 \longleftrightarrow S_2$

On still another plane, aspects connected with S's poem correlate with K's own ordering of his Commentary.

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89. It is also told that a person called "Stella Lazurchik" (236) was known to S from his New Wye reality (*lazur* = 'azure' [Russ.]). She is the well-named spouse of the Wordsmith astronomer "Starover Blue" (l. 627; 56; 236). This may indicate additional relationships between S_1 and S_2 as well as K_2 and K_3.

90. The words were uttered on July 6, 1959, soon after S's birthday (157, 161), and the actual lines were written between July 7 and 10 (cf. 181, 197).

91. ROTH (1975, 222–3) sees here an "Oedipal situation", with K apparently regarding himself as S's "child". I would rather think that this is an outcome of the formal obsession depicted in the novel: a sign of K's urge to create correlations between *any* narrative levels.

(xvi) Most noticeably, S's method of "synchronizing" the two plot-strands of his poem in Canto Two ("And here time forked [. . .]" [l. 404 ff.; 47–51]) matches quite perfectly K's own choice to synchronize Gradus's approach with the actual writing of the poem (cf. 78, 151, 174 *passim:* this notwithstanding his claim that "the synchronization device has been already worked to death by Flaubert and Joyce" [196]). Similarly K's fondness for alphabetic transpositions, phonetic puns, and other word-games in his narrative (above [vi] and [xiv]) is amply duplicated by the stylistic texture of S's poem (below [xxii]).[92] Even individual locutions may be correlated: "[S] No furtive light came from their involute/Abode" (ll. 817–18; 63); "[K] [. . .] not a glint came from the back parlor [. . .]" (90–1); "[S] I think she always nursed a small mad hope" (l. 383; 46); "[K] I [. . .] nursed some hopes for the evening" (287). At one point, K claims outright that one of the verbal figurations in S_2 ("[. . .] old man/Dying in a motel" [ll. 609–10; 55]) has engendered the actual circumstances in which his Commentary is being written:

> [114] This describes rather well the 'chance inn', a log cabin, with a tiled bathroom, where I am trying to coordinate these notes.
> (235)

$K_3 \longleftrightarrow S_1$

There occurs a single correlation between S's real life – as it is reported by K – and motifs belonging to Zembla.

(xvii) Hazel Shade's "poltergeist" experiences (cf. K's reportage on 164–7 and 185–93) find their counterpart in the fake "table-turning séances" (109) organized by Countess de Fyler before King Charles's marriage. This may have some relevance in explaining the cryptic message that Hazel is said to have received during her own vigil in "The Haunted Barn" section of the narrative (below [xxiii]).

$S_1 \longleftrightarrow S_2$

The third major series of inter-level correlations in the novel (besides K: [i]–[vi]; K ⟷ S: [vii]–[xvii]) is constructed between S's "reality" at New Wye and the "fiction" contained in his poem. While these relationships are on one hand made to observe a wholly realistic pattern (cf. [xviii]–[xix] below), a reverse tendency also becomes manifest: certain events in S's life appear to emulate those first occurring on the plane of his poem ([xix], [xx]–[xxi]). We should be reminded once again that all facts concerning S_1 come to us through the medium of K, who is on occasion quite eager to point out instances where fact and fiction do not to his mind correlate.[93] I shall return

92. For a typical duplication cf. the "mountain"/"fountain" -pun in S_2 (l. 802; 62) and the Russo-English play with "crown-crow-cow"/"*korona-vorona-korova*" in K's Commentary (260).

93. E.g. the bizarre scholium on the poet's address to his wife:

> And so I pare my nails, and muse, and hear
> Your steps upstairs, and all is right, my dear.
> (ll. 245–6; 42)
>
> I can [. . .] state that when dear Sybil's steps were heard upstairs, fierce and sharp, above our heads, everything was not always 'all right'.
> (171)

to this question in my remarks on thematic import.

(xviii) *Ornithology.* S's parents were ornithologists (ll. 71–2; 35; 100–1). This may provide at least a partial motivation for the recurrent bird imagery in his poem ("I was the shadow of the waxwing [. . .]" [l. 1; 33], etc.). Altogether, ornithological motifs are used in S's text at least eleven times, alternatively linked with his own person, the fate of his daughter, or the process of poem-composition itself ("I ambulate – and by some mute command/The right word flutes and perches on my hand" [ll. 871–2; 65]). It is told, moreover, that Sybil Shade's maiden name was "Irondell" (from the French 'swallow' – *l'hirondelle* – says K [171]), which may or may not have inspired the metaphoric address to her in Canto Two: "[. . .] Then came your call,/My tender mockingbird, up from the hall" (ll. 421–2; 48).

(xix) *The Clockwork Toy.* In an analogous fashion, any other motif pertaining to the biographic background of the artist may be reflected in his art. In Canto One S tells that in his childhood he was once struck by a mysterious fit of fainting while occupied with a mechanical toy:

> [115] [. . .] One day,
> When I'd just turned eleven, as I lay
> Prone on the floor and watched a clockwork toy –
> A tin wheelbarrow pushed by a tin boy –
> Bypass chair legs and stray beneath the bed,
> There was a sudden sunburst in my head.
> (ll. 141–6; 38)

An ever prudent biographic critic, K reconstructs the original source of these lines (for a similar case cf. above [vii]). A clear-cut transference of a motif from S_1 to S_2 is hence indicated:

> [116] By a stroke of luck I have seen it! [. . .] The boy was a little Negro of painted tin with a keyhole in his side and no breath to speak of, just consisting of two more or less fused profiles, and his wheelbarrow was now all bent and broken.
> (137)

The instance is rendered problematic, however, when S recapitulates the same motif in the concluding lines of his poem:

> [117] And through the flowing shade and ebbing light
> A man, unheedful of the butterfly –
> Some neighbor's gardener, I guess – goes by
> Trundling an empty barrow up the lane.

K himself lives as S's next-door neighbor, and his gardener is black (i.e. "Negro"; cf. 290–2). After ex. [117] – after having sighted a real-life replica of his ancient toy, as it were – S leaves the poem, joins his neighbor on the Goldsworth porch, and is immediately shot dead by the killer (an echo of "a sudden sunburst in [his] head" in ex. [115]). An impression is in this way created that *beings escaping from the inner world of the embedded fiction are taking active part in the killing of their maker.* The connection becomes further underlined when K overtly associates the toy motif with the killer's person: "our clockwork man" (152), "our 'automatic man' " (279), etc. Gradus's own life ended, says K, "not in a feeble splutter of the clockwork but in a gesture of humanoid despair" (299).

(xx) *"gray"/"Grey"*. K also attempts – heavy-handedly, as we have seen – to link the recurrent motif of "grayness" in S_2 with the true identity of the poet's killer (above [viii]). His efforts turn out to be less far-fetched than they might first seem, when we later learn that the *real* murderer was also named "Grey" ([iv]). What is more, metaphoric references to "shooting" occur at various places in the poem. E.g. in connection with a TV-show viewed by S: "An imbecile with sideburns was about to use his gun" (ll. 468–9; 49).[94] Or in connection with S's public lecture, just before his nearly fatal heart attack (another "sunburst"):

> [118] One of those peevish people who attend
> Such talks only to say they disagree
> Stood up and pointed with his pipe at me.
> (ll. 688–90; 58)

(xxi) *Azure*. From K's editorial point of view, the recurring motif of "azure" serves mainly to tie together S's poem and motifs originating in Zembla (above [xiii]). From S's perspective, the opening reference to "false azure" evidently functions as an anticipatory clue, prefiguring the death of his daughter in Canto Two. But the image also anticipates his own death outside the poem. After the shootout, K reports, S lay prone on the Goldsworth lawn "with open dead eyes directed up at the sunny azure" (295). The notion of "falseness" has been actualized in the killer's error concerning the identity of his victim (cf. [iv]), and the continuation of the opening lines suggests the immortality preserved for the poet by his art. Despite his physical death, he

> [119] lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky
> (l. 4; 33)

S_2

Like K's narrative, S's poem also teems with verbal pyrotechnics of every conceivable kind: punning and paronomasic rhymes, recurrent imagery, and other devices designed to bring about a network of internal linkages within the text (above [vi], [xvi]). S's poetic method is quite accurately described by K when he says that –

> [120] [the] poet's plan is to display in the very texture of his text the intricacies of the 'game' in which he seeks the key to life and death.
> (254)

(xxii) The stylistic texture in S_2 would require a small study of its own.[95] Here, it suffices to notice that the audacious rhymes ("possibilities"/"Sybil it is" [ll. 829–30; 63]), puns ("Some kind of link-and-bobolink" [l. 812; *ibid*]) or correlated phonetic motifs (e.g. the "slain"-"pane"-"lane" -series tying together the two ends of the poem) are not merely extrinsic ploys, for they are motivated by the inbuilt thematics of "Pale Fire" itself (cf. K's interpretation in ex. [120]). The same applies to other types of verbal

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94. Cf. also the next item on the TV program: "A jovial Negro raised his trumpet" (l. 470; 49). This anticipates the motions of K's black gardener when he later subdues the gunman with his spade (294). We may here speak of a correlation between S's reality (S_1) and a second-degree fiction inside his poem (S_3).

95. For some remarks on the poem as an autonomous text cf. FIELD 1967, 106–13.

and compositional symmetries manipulated in the text. Typically, S's choice of his allusive title ("Some moondrop title" [ll. 961–2; 68]) is anticipated by verbal elements inside the actual discourse: in Canto One he has already reported that his Aunt Maud used to keep "[her] verse book open at the Index (Moon,/Moonrise, Moor, Moral)" (ll. 94–5; 36; cf. also l. 107; *ibid*). The instant of Hazel Shade's death is deftly synchronized with her parents' TV-watching: "Oh switch it off! And as life snapped we saw/A pointed light dwindle and die in black/Infinity" (ll. 472–4; 50).[96] And similarly the portentous motifs of "azure" ([xiii], [xxi]) or "clockwork toy" (above [xix]) function within a deliberate artistic pattern controlled by the poet himself – it is only outside the text that they turn out to be lethal.

S_1

From what we know of S's "real life" apart from his poem, we may infer that it contained at least one remarkable coincidence.

(xxiii) The lengthy scene built around Hazel Shade's experiences in "The Haunted Barn" (185–93) is reportedly based by K on her notes (187–8). Among these, there occurs a fragmentary transcription of the "poltergeist" message that she recorded during her investigations in the barn (cf. also above [xvii]):

> [121] pada ata lane pad not ogo old wart alan ther tale feur far rant lant tal told (188)

K urges his reader to "seek a secret design in the abrakadabra" (189), but offers no tangible clue. All he says is that the excerpt seems to have "[no] bearing on the circumstances of [Hazel's] soon-coming death" (*ibid*). And while we might ourselves be hard put to produce a complete gloss of the passage,[97] it would still seem to have some bearing – if not on Hazel, at least on the future fate of her father. May we induce that the medial part of the cluster in ex. [121] comprises both a warning – "not to go" – and a destination: the "Goldsworth" house, where, presumably, a "tale of a far-away land is being told"? "Tale feur" may suggest the title of S's poem, and "lane" corresponds both to its last word and to the place where the shooting will occur (the "lane" in front of Judge Goldsworth's house [cf. 293–4]). It is three years after the message is recorded by his daughter that S, unheedful of these premonitions, accompanies K to the neighboring house and steps into Gradus's (K_3), or Grey's (S_1/K_2), fire.

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96. Another $S_3 \longleftrightarrow S_2$ correlation: Hazel's sinking into the "crackling, gulping swamp" (l. 500; 51) correlates with the noticeably "liquid" quality of the program viewed by her parents. Compare:

> The famous face *flowed* in, fair and inane:
> The parted lips, the *swimming* eyes, the grain
> Of beauty on the cheek, odd gallicism,
> And the soft form *dissolving* in the prism
> Of corporate desire.
> (ll. 453–7; 49; my emphases)

97. For previous attempts with the excerpt cf. WALKER 1976, 212–13; ADAMS 1977, 153; ROWE 1981, 27. Similar messages have been used by VN in "*Ultima Thule*" and "The Vane Sisters".

"It was the shadow of Gogol that lived his real life – the life of his books" (*NG,* 26), as VN writes in his biographic sketch of the Russian novelist. In his lecture on *Ulysses* the author points out that, despite the overflow of biographies on Joyce, "not much has been written about the real Joyce, Joyce the artist" (*Lectures 1,* 326). In his essay on Pushkin, written at the close of VN's first European period, he had quite similarly expounded the total subordination of the poet's life to patterns originating in his art:

> [122] *La vie d'un poète est comme le pastiche de son oeuvre.*
> ("*Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable*", 367)

Two decades later, in *Pale Fire,* the same notion was to be rehearsed in a couplet assigned to an invented poet:

> [123] *Man's life as commentary to abstruse*
> *Unfinished poem.* Note for further use.
> (ll. 939–40; 67; emphasis in the text)

Above, we have been tracing a network of textual linkages through which this tenet is given a specifically narrative form. In *Pale Fire,* as in the Shakespearean "pale fire" -parable that it incorporates, virtually any narrative level may turn out to be "reflected in" (correlated with) another level. A large group of correlations within the text describes the transference of motifs from the outer level of the narrated reality into the embedded level of either K's or S's private fiction (i.e. [i]–[v], [xvii]–[xix]). Other groups may display cunning back-and-forth switches between the separate levels of fiction constructed by the two agents ([vii]–[xiii]); between their respective levels of reality ([xv]); between fiction and reality ([xiv], [xvi]–[xvii]); or *within* any single level ([vi], [xxii]–[xxiii]). Still others, the most mysterious instances of all, exhibit fictive motifs anticipating and controlling the outer reality inside which they are embedded (cf. again [xix] plus [xx]–[xxi]). What results, might be defined – in Genettean terms – as "a vast expansion of metalepsis" (GENETTE 1972, 235): a system in which all relationships between narrative levels are made reversible. It remains to consider the ultimate source of these linkages within the total framework of the narrative.

We have already rejected readings by those critics who propose to explain the novel by assigning all its embedded levels to a single narrating agent. On the other hand, some explanation should still be given for the manifold, curiously a-realistic coincidences planted into the narrative design.

The answer is to be sought, I think, by taking a closer look into the role of the fictive editor (K_1) in the afore-described system. According to K's own estimate, "it is the commentator who has the last word" (29), and at least in a purely narrative-theoretical sense he is correct: his is the level within which all others are contained (I refer again to the scheme in *Fig. 4*). This does not have to mean that he goes about "inventing" everything in the narrative, but it does give him a unique opportunity to *correlate* his own editorial discourse with all other discourses uttered inside the text.

To begin again with the obvious cases, it is quite clearly K who is responsible for the connections linking his own everyday reality with the world of Zembla ([i]–[v]), just as he has himself created the multiple verbal linkages inside the Zembla-narrative (above [vi]). As obviously, it is he again who attunes the discourse on Zembla so that its particulars come to coincide with S's poem ([vii]–[xiii]), despite his constant claims to

the contrary. And it is he who holds a complete verbal control over the narrated history of S's life, which he appears to be quite purposefully correlating with the "anticipatory" details that occur in the poem. We should mark, for instance, that all descriptions of "Gradus" (as well as of "Grey") are fully dependent on K's own discourse (e.g. [iv], [vi], [viii], [xx]): it is only due to these references that certain verbal motifs in S's text appear to us as prophetic. Similarly the recurrent occurrences of "clockwork toy" in S_2 become portentous only after K has himself linked them with details properly belonging to the murder-scene (above [xix]). The motif of "azure" from the opening lines of the poem would hardly seem meaningful in relation to S's death, if it were not for K's announcement that after the shooting the poet lay on the lawn "with [. . .] eyes directed up at [. . .] azure" (above [xxi]). And in an analogous manner, any other hidden correlation between separate levels of fiction in the novel is made to disclose behind it a verbal control that can originate only in the editor.[98] We may say, in this sense, that *while S remains in control over the artistic system of his poem, it is K who is responsible for the system of the comprehensive narrative as a work of art.*

But if this is accepted, what then of the thematic import in the novel? In other words, why would K as an editor do all this? What lies behind his huge investment in Nabokovian "correlations"?

One explanation resides in his apparent insanity: K writes his Commentary solely for the purpose of proving that the edited poem is, after all, about Zembla and that he himself is the fugitive Zemblan monarch. This is a commonly accepted reading, and it has much to recommend it.[99] Most certainly K appears to us as a confirmed madman on the plane of his everyday reality at New Wye (cf. the testimony of his academic colleagues on 25, 195, 238 *passim*). On the other hand, he is not only a hero in his own narrative, but also *its fictive creator,* and it would seem a facile solution indeed to dismiss the designs that he brings about here as nothing more than a madman's fancy. As S has reportedly said in reply to one of K's campus detractors:

> [124] [Madness] is the wrong word [. . .] One should not apply it to *a person who deliberately peels off a drab and unhappy past and replaces it with a brilliant invention.* (238; my emphasis)

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98. This may still leave some isolated instances in the text unexplained. What are we to make e.g. of Hazel Shade's poltergeist message (cf. [xxiii])? Is it "real"? Or is it, too, an outcome of the editor's quest for correlations? Whatever our decision may be with regard to this particular case, the fact remains that *the choice* to transmit certain bits of background information (e.g. those pertaining to the message) belongs to K.

99. The majority of critics writing on the novel tend to stop at this stage. So e.g. FOWLER sees K as merely the butt of authorial ironies (1974, 112–21), while S is as unequivocally "the darling of the author" (92). For a largely similar view – S as fully "reliable" and mad K as "unreliable" – cf. PIFER (1980, 110–18), or the assertion by EDELSTEIN that "Shade is the only character in *Pale Fire* conscious of the Nabokovian tenet that we each devise our own reality" (1982, 221). On the other hand, MADDOX has stated, in her entirely rewarding analysis, that "[the] vision of *Pale Fire* is [. . .] compounded of two perspectives [i.e. K+S], and its particular quality depends upon the interplay of the two" (1983, 33). Cf. also the paper by WALKER (1976, esp. 218–20) and the latter half of ALTER (1975b, 203–17). Although my emphasis has been different, I, too, opt for the synthetic vision.

In the same context S calls his neighbor "a fellow poet" (*ibid*),[100] and in a later passage K himself takes up his capacities as a "poet":

> [125] I do not consider myself a true artist, save in one matter: I can do what only a true artist can do – *pounce upon the forgotten butterfly of revelation, wean myself abruptly from the habit of things, see the web of the world, and the warp and the weft of that web.* (289; my emphasis)

I would argue that predominantly the latter concern motivates K's effort to fuse together his own discourse and S's embedded poem into a new and meaningful whole.

S's text is written to propound the thesis that an inherent order – "a web of sense" (l. 810; 63) – lies behind man's life. This order, he says, can become manifest only through verbal creation ("In terms of combinational delight" [l. 973; 69]). Nonetheless, the poet's own life ends in a most senseless manner. Shot dead because of an absurd error, his work still in a disjointed manuscript form, S's worst premonitions seem to be coming true:

> [126] [. . .] What if you are tossed
> Into a boundless void, your bearings lost,
> Your spirit stripped and utterly alone,
> Your task unfinished, your despair unknown.
> (ll. 540–3; 53)

As for K, he attempts to counter this vision by composing an elaborate verbal structure around the poem; by planting hidden correlations between its disparate parts; and by rendering in this manner a completely new sense to occurrences in S's life that would otherwise have remained haphazard. In this, he emerges as the primary source of order in the narrative, while many of his seemingly outrageous asides to "the pedestrian reader" (231; above ex. [111]) or to "the scurrilous and the heartless" (95; above ex. [108]) are given a more profound motivation. Any reader who refuses to take K's invention seriously poses a threat not only to his status as the ruler of Zembla: the incredulous reader is also a threat to the status of his text as imaginative art in its own right.

In the end, it is this suggestion that connects *Pale Fire* with those "large themes" that have been said to be lacking from the novel by some of its previous critics.[101] At an early point in his poem S pronounces his task as a writer to be "to [. . .] fight/The

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100. Quite similarly in *The Waltz Invention* the madman-hero Waltz is termed "a haggard inventor; a fellow author" (cf. the list of characters, unpagin.).

101. The term is used by MACDONALD 1962, 437. The following assessment by STEGNER also deserves to be cited, in all its naiveté:

> Until it can be demonstrated that *Pale Fire* does deal in some way with moral truth and valid experience, I can admire the poem and the language and humor of Kinbote's commentary, and be amazed by its complexity, but I must remain skeptical about its greatness and, in fact, its durability.
> (1966, 131–2)

foul, the inadmissible abyss" of death and oblivion (ll. 178–9; 39).[102] In his own portion of the text K proves himself to be a full-fledged Nabokovian artist by attempting the same feat through the very act of narrative-making itself. Commenting on one particular correlation in the narrative, he would seem to be speaking for all memoiristic N-agents in his maker's opus, never allowed to forget the abyss of meaninglessness that exists outside their carefully crafted verbal constructions:

> [127] I trust the reader appreciates the strangeness of this, because if he does not, there is no sense in writing poems, or notes to poems, or anything at all.
> (207)

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102. This coincides again with the poetics of both S's and K's maker. According to VN's aforecited dictum from *Speak, Memory,* he considers it his own artistic task to "fight the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence" (above ex. [82] and Introduction [0.4.]).

PART TWO

THE NARRATIVE TEXT

> [. . .] so that my visual image may show through like a watermark [. . .]
> (ASp; *TD*, 125)
>
> [. . .] when every page in the book of one's personal fate bears His watermark [. . .]
> (*PF*, 222)
>
> In this memoir my wives and my books are interlaced monogrammatically like some sort of watermark or *ex libris* design.
> (*LH!*, 85)

4

THE MODEL

4.1. *Author and Reader as Narratological Concepts*

Beyond N-Agents

In the first part of this study the discussion was limited to such instances in Nabokovian fiction as are explainable with the auxiliary notion of "narrator". In other words, we have been talking as if *the whole of the narrative text* belonged to its fictive N. More than one leading theorist of narrative fiction has been of the mind that this is indeed where the analysis should be stopped, for what awaits us beyond N-agent's level is merely unwarranted speculation on stands taken by the "real" author behind his invented speakers. So e.g. DOLEŽEL begins his afore-cited typology of narrative forms with an express statement that "the relationship between the narrator and the author is irrelevant for the structural theory" (1967, 542). Similarly GENETTE (1972, 229; 1983, 94–104) says that when we are studying Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from a narratological standpoint we are allowed to speak only of the "fictive author" – of Crusoe, that is, but not of the author Defoe.[1]

The theorists' rigor has its point, but it nonetheless requires qualification. It is not difficult to name particular texts that can no longer be explained with a model omitting all levels outside the control of fictive N. One needs only to mention some entirely obvious cases: Hermann Karlovich's narrative in *Despair* or the section assigned to John Ray in *Lolita* (Foreword, 5–7); Gogol's "Diary of a Madman"; Dostoevskij's *Notes from the Underground;* Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint;* Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" or "The Investigations of a Hound" – the list could be easily expanded to a quite unmanageable length.

Despair, as we recall, is presented as the account of an authentic crime. Addressing his discourse to policemen, newspaper reporters, or the general readerdom at large, Hermann proceeds to reconstruct his past misdeeds with the purpose of bringing out their inherently "artistic" motivation. (Compare: "To explain to the world the depth of my masterpiece, did I devise the writing of the present tale" [204–5].) As for

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1. In another instance Genette does refer to examples from narrative literature in which "the author's intention" diverges from that of his fictive N (1972, 197–8), but he goes no further. In my view the latter would hold true even for *Robinson Crusoe,* where it is not Crusoe's intention to write *a novel.* Precisely such cross-purposes will be pursued in the present discussion.

John Ray's Foreword in *Lolita,* it is addressed to "all of us – parents, social workers, educators" (7), and its purpose is to justify the publication of Humbert Humbert's memoir mainly on moral grounds – because of "the ethical impact the book should have on the serious reader" (*ibid*). In either case, it will be readily apparent that within the framework of the comprehensive text N-agent's intentions do not come off. Hermann Karlovich manages only to incriminate himself with his tale, and similarly the narrative that follow's Ray's Foreword hardly justifies his moral-minded reading. I.e., to put it briefly: in these examples the discourse fails in the role given to it by its fictive utterer, whereas in the function intended by the author behind the fiction it may still succeed – this is the structural idea observed in the two novels. Essentially the same principle is at work in the texts by Gogol' (whose diarist is a madman), Roth and Dostoevskij (likewise), or Kafka, who employs as his N an ape – or a hound – claiming for himself the status of a human.

In an actual reading-situation, the reader normally accomplishes the required mental leap by aid of pure intuition. Reading *Despair,* we soon begin to suspect that there may be more to the text than Hermann is claiming, and after this we construe behind his voice an "author" whom we take to be responsible for the full import in the novel. With *Portnoy's Complaint* or with the Foreword to *Lolita* this is bound to happen still faster. With "Diary of a Madman" our response is immediate. In the domain of narrative theory, the developments have not been quite as swift, and reasoned expositions of those principles that extend beyond N-agent's control in fiction have been given only in relatively recent studies. (Even though here, too, we must initially go back to BAKHTIN. Attention was devoted to the topic as early as in his first book on Dostoevskij: on "the author's attitude penetrat[ing] into the narrator's word" cf. 1929, 105 *passim.* The discussion is recapitulated in 1963, 158.)

It is due to these investigations that "author" – as well as the attendant notion of "reader" – have resurfaced in the theory of fiction, although it once seemed that their banishment would be complete.

The Applied Booth-Chatman Model of the Narrative Text

The best-known approach to the question originates in BOOTH (1961) and his analyses of ironic and "unreliable" narration (esp. " 'Secret Communion' between Author and Reader", 300–9; amplified in 1974 and 1983, 428–31). The same notions have been taken up by CHATMAN (1978, 147–51, 233–7), who attempts to systematize Booth's somewhat impressionistic terminology. The model presented in *Fig. 5* may hence be called *the Booth-Chatman model,* even if neither of the two theorists has offered precisely this type of a graph – the distinctions themselves still underlie their analyses.[2]

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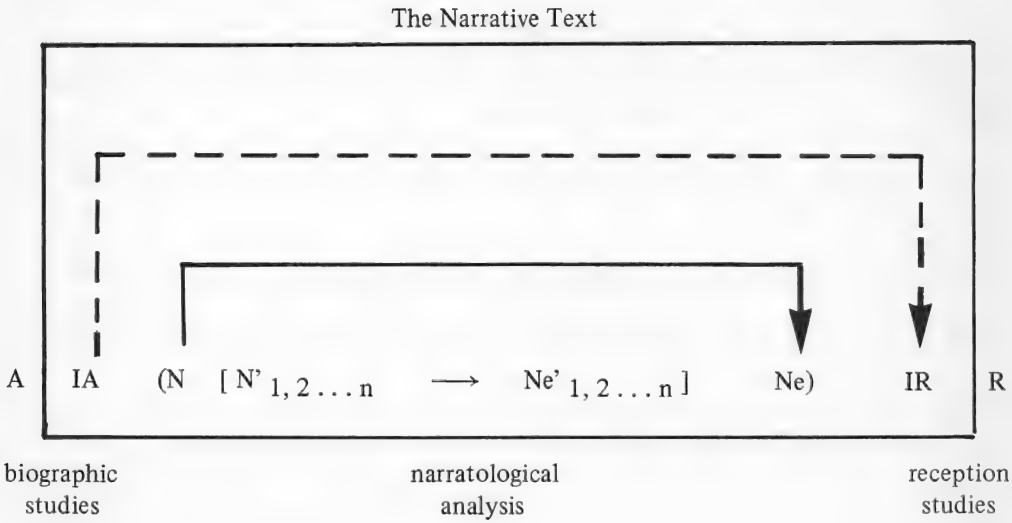
2. As such, the diagram is of course based on the general communication model, proposed for literary texts by JAKOBSON 1960, 253. The applicability of the model has been discussed e.g. by BRONZWAER 1978; NØJGAARD 1979; ECO 1979, 3–43; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 86–105. I have been guided in my own approach by insights provided in LEHTONEN 1977. Cf. also TAMMI 1983a, 46–8.

Fig. 5

The Applied Model



A = real (historical) author
IA = implied author
N = narrator
N' = narrators within embedded narrative levels
R = real reader
IR = implied reader
Ne = narratee
Ne' = narratees of embedded narratives
⟶ = direct narrative communication
– – → = indirect communication

As it appears, the real author as a historical person as well as the "real" reader are still excluded from our scheme. The author's biography or the actual reception of his texts may well be studied (neither question is devoid of interest in VN's case: although I have so far declined from commentary on his biographic background, there has already been ample discussion of readings provided by the author's critics). But comments on these questions do not concern the ordering of *the narrative text.* In pursuing narratological analysis we should take into account the following relationships.

(i) *IA – – → IR.* "Implied author" is the term introduced by BOOTH (1961, 70–1) to designate that *version* of the author which may be deduced from the text: a given type of a text (humorous, philosophic, pornographic) always presupposes a given type of an author. The question does not bear upon the historical person, for we are liable to construe such a version also when we know it to differ from the real author (he may have published a pornographic text merely to finance his more serious writing), or even when we do not know whether there has ever existed a single author ("Homer's"

Odyssey). In Booth's formulation:

> As [the author] writes, he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works [. . .]. [T]he picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects.
> (*ibid;* cf. also 1974, 11; 1983, 429–30)

The strictly textual nature of the construction is underlined in still more unequivocal terms by CHATMAN when he says that IA is –

> [. . .] the principle that invented the narrator [. . .]. To confound the 'implied author', a structural principle, with a certain historical figure, [. . .] would seriously undermine our theoretical enterprise.
> (1978, 148–9)

And the same orientation is found in this statement by BAKHTIN:

> *The author of a literary work exists only in the entire work [. . .] he exists *in that inseparable entity in which form and content are unified into a whole.*[3]
> (1975, 203; my emphasis)

In an analogous manner, "implied reader" (the term is used by ISER 1972, 29–32 *passim;* cf. BOOTH 1961, 138; 1983, 429–30; CHATMAN 1978, 149–51), or "model reader" (ECO 1979, 11 *passim*), is deduced from the text: he is the hypothetical reader whose linguistic decoding abilities, cultural background, or general world-view have been taken into account in selecting properties of the discourse. (BAKHTIN talked aptly of a "hidden polemic" with the reader's world-view [1929, 123; 1963, 163; 1975, 204–5] – this is a useful notion when studying Nabokovian strategies, and we shall yet have occasion to apply it.)[4]

It may not be so important how we choose to name these structural entities, but it is quite significant to notice the difference between the two communicative systems contained in our model. It would not be correct to say that IA "narrates" something within the confines of the text.[5] What rather happens is that the validity of assertions

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3. Cf. the entire discussion running through BAKHTIN 1929, 105–35 and 1963, 150–69. In Slavic narratology, similar views have been reiterated by USPENSKY: "When we speak of the authorial point of view [. . .] we refer not to the author's world view in general, independent of his work, but only to the viewpoint which he adopts for the organization of the narrative in a particular work" (1970, 11).

4. Cf. also the notion of "prestructuring" a text according to assumptions about its potential readers in ISER 1972, xii, 29–56 *passim.* Or ECO: "The Reader is strictly defined by the lexical and the syntactic organization of the text: the text is nothing but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader" (1979, 10). In this sense (in the sense of a structural principle) the concept of "reader" has emerged only in recent studies, and the work done by Iser, Chatman, and Eco, among other theoreticians, has been essential in furthering our understanding of the question. For a very useful summing-up of trends in modern reader-oriented criticism cf. SULEIMAN 1980.

5. E.g. PELC (1971, 14–15) has proposed to use the term "apparent narrator" for fictive N and "real narrator" for an entity that corresponds to Booth's implied author. This would have the drawback of equating the concrete narrative act assigned to N and the entirely different act accomplished by IA in the background of the text. Cf. ATAROVA-LESSKIS (1976, 343–4; 1980, 34–5), who also seem to have some trouble in keeping the notions of "author" and "narrator" entirely separate.

addressed directly by N to his fictive audience is made suspect in one way or another, in which case the reader is led to search for the import of this discrepancy from a higher textual level. "Today is a day of great triumph. There *is* a king of Spain. He has been found at last. That king is *me*" (GOGOL' 1834, 33; emphases in the text), claims the Gogolian diarist, and it would be a credulous reader indeed who would take his assertion at a face value. In the same way, the reader implied by the total design of *Lolita* will hardly associate himself with the naive audience addressed by its editor, choosing rather to side with the author from whose viewpoint the addressees are mocked. This process is here called, for lack of better terms, *indirect communication* between IA and IR (Booth's "secret communion"; cf. also 1974, 137–72; CHATMAN 1978, 233–7).

That such concepts are necessary in studying fiction should become evident from the examples cited above. For if we refuse to relate Poprishchin's failure in Gogol's story (or the numerous related failures of N-agents in Nabokovian novels) to the higher authorial viewpoint governing the work, this will inevitably lead to an inadequate view of the narrative text as well. It is only when, as BOOTH says, "all distance between the essential norms of [IA] and the norms of [IR] [are] eliminate[d]" (1961, 157; 1974, 233) that a successful reading of the text *as a work of art* may take place. The specific problems involved in such a communicatory process will form one of the subjects to be discussed in the present section of the study.

(ii) $N \longrightarrow Ne$. Contained within the first system, there is the one directly manifested in the text: N addressing his discourse to a definite "audience" (or "narratee": the term was introduced by PRINCE 1971a, b, 1973; for amplifications cf. GENETTE 1972, 259–62; CHATMAN 1978, 253–62; NØJGAARD 1979; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 103–5). Like any N, also Ne-agents may be overtly individuated ("Ladies and gentlemen of the jury" [*L*, 11], "Soviet youths of today" [*Ds*, 169], "Anybody willing to listen to us" [*PF*, 278]), or they may be left indeterminate (*The Defense, Glory, The Gift*). It is normally the case that the degree to which the audience is concretized depends on the amount of self-reference in N-agent's own discourse. If N indulges only in covert reference to his narrating person (as in *The Defense*), it is obvious that also Ne will remain unspecified – although we should still notice that an overtly named teller need not name his audience if he does not wish to do so.[6] Indirect communication behind N-agent's and Ne-agent's backs, however, may be activated only in those cases where N himself is made overt (i.e. when he is overtly differentiated from "the author": as GENETTE accurately observes, any Ne addressed by covert N in effect "merges with the implied reader" [1972, 260; 1983, 91–2]). The strategies applied in Nabokovian narration for this type of compositional play will constitute another central topic in our subsequent discussion.

(iii) $N'_{1,2\ldots n} \longrightarrow Ne'_{1,2\ldots n}$. Narrative embedding was discussed in the foregoing chapters. One standard example comes from *Odyssey* (Books IX to XII), where Ulysses himself takes on the task of narration, hence becoming N'_1 with regard to the group of

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6. E.g. in "Slice of Life" the teller – "Maria Vasilevna" – in no way specifies *for whom* she is in fact recounting the story. This would seem to be the case also in narratives like "The Assistant Producer", "Spring in Fialta", or "*Terra Incognita*".

Phaecians (Ne'_1) for whom the history is being told. Moreover, when Ulysses recounts his invented past to the Cyclops (in Book XII), he assumes the status of N'_2, while Polyfemos becomes Ne'_2 as the addressee of his story. In principle, there may be any number of embedded narratives in a text (we have seen that in *Pale Fire* embedding goes at least four levels deep into the novel [3.2.3.]), and each of them includes its own system of addressing and receiving. In such instances it is common that the narrative functions of the protagonists change according to the level: N-agents of primary levels become Ne-agents or Ne'-agents inside the narrated histories (e.g. in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness;* such shiftings have been varied by VN e.g. in "Bachmann", "Cloud, Castle, Lake", " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' ", or *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*).[7]

The above scheme is symmetric in the sense that narrative communication may properly take place only within the bounds of a single level. IA cannot communicate with agents existing on Ne-level; N may not tell anything to his Ne'-agents, even though he may tell *of* them; and none of the subordinate tellers can address receivers on the outer hierarchic levels. It is only in parodic and anomalous cases that the latter may occur – to the chagrin of model-makers, whose scrupulous schematizations are always in danger of being upended by the actual practice in narrative texts. Purportedly citing an embedded epistle from the Zemblan king to Queen Disa, Kinbote has his speaker urge the addressee to look up a certain item – after which a bizarre injunction is added:

> [1] [. . .] see again – I mean the reader should see again – the note to line 49 [. . .][8]
> (*PF,* 257)

4.2. *The Problem of* **Persona**: *Author's Metatext in Nabokov*

4.2.1. The Problem

These additional remarks are made necessary by VN's idiosyncratic handling of the concept *author* both within and without his fiction. (For preliminary comments on the question cf. above 1.1.3.).

On one hand, VN's aversion for the biographic approach to literature is well known.

> [2] I hate tampering with the precious lives of great writers and I hate Tom-peeping over the fence of those lives – I hate the vulgarity of 'human interest', I hate the rustle of skirts and giggles in the corridors of time – and no biographer will ever catch a glimpse of my private life.
> (*Lectures 2,* 138)

This is VN in the midst of his Tolstoj-lecture, indulging in one of those characteristic asides that spiral straight back to his personal poetics. "I object to the prototypical quest as blurring the authentic, always atypical methods of a genius" (*EO,* 2, 229), he

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7. On the other hand, there is nothing to prevent N-agent's role from being preserved: in *Pale Fire* and *Bend Sinister,* for instance, N is in effect telling *of his own narrative act.* The situation is not quite as rare as GENETTE (1972, 229n) gives to understand.

8. In an equally flagrant instance from *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert intrudes with an address to his "learned reader" (49) even into the quoted excerpt from his Ramsdale diary. Such shifting of Ne-agents will be submitted to a separate scrutiny in 5.2.2.

writes in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin,* and related sallies on "the sleuths of prototypism" are a staple feature throughout the author's critical writings (*ibid,* 87, 120–35; cf. also "*Zametki perevodchika*", 2). These become still more accentuated in his comments on his own writing. In Foreword to *The Waltz Invention* he derides in advance "critics belonging to the good old school of 'projected biography', who examine an author's work, which they do not understand, through the prism of his life, which they do not know" (unpagin.). Prefacing *The Gift* he similarly warns against "[the reader's] say[ing] 'aha' and identifying the designer with the design" (7). "Seekers of biographical tidbits should be warned", VN says in a note appended to "Torpid Smoke", asserting that "[his] main delight in [creating émigré heroes] was to invent ruthlessly assortments of exiles who [. . .] were utterly unlike any of the Nabokovs" (*RB,* 26). And still in Foreword to *Glory,* the last in the series of authorial notes to his translated novels, he deemed it necessary to underline:

> [3] The author trusts that wise readers will refrain from avidly flipping through his autobiography [. . .] in quest of duplicate items or kindred scenery. The fun of *Glory* is elsewhere.
> (xiv)

At the same time, paradoxically, the author has drawn attention to certain minute correlations between motifs occurring in his fiction and those belonging to his published autobiography. In *Speak, Memory* he addresses his words to "the future specialist in such dull literary lore as autoplagiarism" (37), pointing out an unmistakable affinity between the "Faber-pencil" episode from Chapter Two of the memoir (37–9) and a corresponding incident from the opening chapter in *The Gift* (28–30). "I know I should not point out these plums to people" (*SM,* 134), he notes in another instance, with humorous self-reprehension, creating still a new linkage between the memoir and items buried within his fiction.[9] Even a bare catalogue of such intertextual shiftings – often noted in Nabokov-scholarship[10] – suggests a literary method that goes far beyond the standard use of a writer's background as a "source" for his artistic creation. Before we proceed any further, this seeming paradox must be looked into in more detail.

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9. The "plum" concerns, in this instance, an affinity between the name of a German entomologist who had once anticipated the author in discovering a formerly undescribed moth ("*Plusia excelsa* Kretschmar" [*SM,* 134]) and the name of the unfortunate protagonist in *Kamera obskura:* "Bruno Kretschmar" (*LD* R, 7 *passim*). "Kretschmar" does not function in the Russian version of the memoir (cf. *SM* R, 124) and – to further complicate the matter – the name was altered into "Albinus" in the English edition of *Laughter in the Dark.* An entire plum pudding will emerge once we delve deeper into such correlations inside the Nabokovian opus.

10. E.g. FIELD has referred to "casual autobiographical markings" (1977, 102) as one of the distinctive features of VN's prose fiction. His two studies (1967; 1977) include running commentaries on such markers, although, as it will soon appear, he may not always have been sufficiently careful as to their narrative status. One of the first critics to draw attention to occurrences of autobiographic motifs in VN's novels was MICHA 1964b, 2 *passim.* Among others there have been LEE 1964, 225–6; APPEL 1967a, b, 1970a, xx *passim;* BODENSTEIN 1977, 343–7, 361–2 *passim.* GRAYSON (1977, 227–31) includes a whole Appendix on "Autobiographical Material" in VN's Russian fiction. In addition, we should mention a very good chapter entitled "Constructing the Author" in PACKMAN (1982, 10–19), which grapples with some of the theoretical issues that also concern the present discussion.

Let us first tabulate some typical instances of motif-correlation from various parts of the canon – an easy task, for what we have here would seem to be a veritable gold mine for any determined "sleuth of prototypism" (VN's definition above).

(i) Consider the linkages hidden inside the following three chess games, alternatively played between the author and V.D. Nabokov while sailing off from Crimea in 1919 (ex. [4]); between Luzhin and *his* father in *The Defense* (ex. [5]); and between still other, unidentified players from Vadim's novel "*Pawn Takes Queen*" embedded within the main text in *Look at the Harlequins!* (ex. [6]). The very precise correlations are symptomatic of an entire method:

> [4] I remember trying to concentrate, as we were zigzagging out of the bay, on a game of chess with my father – one of the knights had lost its head and a poker chip replaced a missing rook – and the sense of leaving Russia was totally eclipsed by the agonizing thought that Reds or no Reds, letters from Tamara would still be coming [. . .]
> (*SM*, 251)
>
> [5] One of the Pawns was replaced by an absurd purple-colored affair in the shape of a tiny bottle; in place of one Rook there was a checker; the Knights were headless and the one horse's head that remained after the box had been emptied (leaving a small die and a red counter) turned out not to fit any of them.
> (*Df*, 49)
>
> [6] [Lyuba] remembered thousands of enchanting minutiae scattered through all my novels such as [. . .] the chess set [. . .] with a missing Knight 'replaced by some sort of counter, a little orphan from another, unknown, game [. . .]'.
> (*LH!*, 83)

(ii) The same "typographical" picture of Tolstoj hangs on the wall of a village schoolmaster visited by the author back in 1915 (*SM*, 154) and in the premises of another schoolmaster, the elder Bychkov, in "The Circle" (*RB*, 260). In his memoir VN tells that the outlines of the portrait were composed of the text in Tolstoj's "Master and Man", and in the first version of "The Circle" also the Russian title of the story – "*Kholstomer*" (Cr R; *VF*, 45) – was given. (The title is omitted from the English revision. Compare: "[. . .] a portrait of Leo Tolstoy, entirely composed of the text of one of his stories [. . .]" [*RB*, 260].)

(iii) The same, or at least similar, "colored slides" are shown during the reading of a Lermontov poem ("*Mtsyri*") in *Speak, Memory* (162–5) and in an episode from "A Bad Day" (*DS*, 33–4). Also the pseudonymous alias of the author's former tutor "Lenski" (who showed him the slides) reoccurs as "Elenski" in the latter text. (Cf. the Russian original, where he was called "Jakov Semenovich" [BD R; *Sogl*, 93], with no intertextual connotations.)

(iv) Similar "colored pencils" are used by VN during his drawing lessons in the early 1900's (*SM*, 101) and by Fyodor in his childhood in *The Gift* (185). The pencils crop up also in the long narrative poem "*Detstvo*" (*GP*, 94),[11] and in a parodically distorted

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11. I.e. "Childhood". This untranslated text might be regarded as the earliest version of the memoiristic discourse in *Speak, Memory*. Also another early poem, "*Ut pictura poesis*" (with a dedication to M.V. Dobuzhinskij [*Stikhi* 1979, 181]), commemorates the same drawing lessons as Chapter Four in *Speak, Memory* (on Dobuzhinskij cf. 92–4).

guise in *Ada* (468–9), where Van Veen uses them for his psychiatric experiments.

(v) Precisely the same method is used by VN's mother for fastening the wedding ring of her dead husband to her own finger in *Speak, Memory* and by "V's" widowed mother in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.*[12] Compare:

> [7] With great clarity, I can see her sitting at a table and serenely considering the laid-out cards of a game of solitaire [. . .] The double gleam in her fourth finger is two marriage rings – her own and my father's which, being too large for her, is fastened to hers by a bit of black thread.
> (*SM,* 50)
>
> [8] I remember the way my mother sat, with her hands in her lap twirling my father's wedding ring [. . .] which she wore on the same finger as her own and which was so large that she had tied it to her own with black thread.
> (*SK,* 26)

(vi) The figure of "Mademoiselle" from Chapter Five of *Speak, Memory* (95–118; cf. also MO F) gives rise to a whole compendium of intertextual linkages (as the author himself points out at the opening of the chapter [*SM,* 95]). E.g. her manner of lowering herself into an armchair (*SM,* 96; *Df,* 128); her ascension by the "geographic patches" decorating the elevator shaft in the Nabokov house at St. Petersburg (MO F, 163–4; *Df,* 128–9); her habit of feeding liquorice to her pupils (*SM,* 107; *Df,* 129); or her subsequent residence at Switzerland, where she is visited by her former charge (*SM,* 115–17). The latter occurrence is recapitulated when V travels to meet his and his brother's retired governess in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (19–22): even the minuscule motifs of "a water-color view of Chillon castle" (*SK,* 20; *SM,* 115) or an "ear-trumpet" (*SK,* 21; *SM,* 116) are evoked in both episodes.

(vii) Another network of recurrences is derived from the author's university years at Cambridge (Chapter Thirteen of *Speak, Memory,* 259–73): the motif of burning the London *Times* in a fireplace (*SM,* 266; *Gl,* 56); the motif of newspaper vendors crying "piper" (*SM,* 269; *Gl,* 72: "pie-pa"; *SK,* 40: "piping cries"); or the motif of coming upon an edition of Dahl's *Interpretative Dictionary of the Living Russian Language* at a Cambridge market place (*SM,* 265) – the incident recurs in "*Universitetskaja poema*", which is in its entirety devoted to the speaker's recollections of his years in an English university:

> [9] [. . .] – *v zimnij den',*
> *kogda, izgnannika pechalja,*
> *shol sneg, kak v russkom gorodke, –*
> *nashol ja Pushkina i Dalja*
> *na zakoldovannom lotke.*
> [* – on a winter day/when, making an exile feel sad,/snow was falling as in a Russian town, –/I found Pushkin and Dal'/in an enchanted bookstall.]
> (V; 225)

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12. A related correlation: V's recollections of his father's fatal duel (fought in 1912 [*SK,* 11–13]) all but duplicate VN's own description of V.D. Nabokov's duel, almost fought in 1911 (*SM,* 188–93). The incident is evoked also in "Orache" (*DS,* 45–55).

(viii) In addition, the "Tamara" -episode from Chapter Twelve of *Speak, Memory* (229–51), where the history of the author's youthful romance is recounted, provides one of the most persistently recurring motifs in the Nabokovian canon. Not only are specific settings and incidents from the memoir recapitulated throughout the description of the hero's romance in *Mary* (cf. VN's remarks in his Introduction, xi–xii), as well as in *The Gift* (145–6), *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (128–30), "The Admiralty Spire" (*TD,* 132–5), "Christmas" (*DS,* 159), or "A Letter That Never Reached Russia" (*DS,* 83; cf. *SM* [235–6] for the corresponding museum-incident) – but also individual verbal figurations: the comparison of Tamara's letters to butterflies (*SM,* 251; *M,* 91),[13] or of herself to a "Camberwell Beauty" (*SM,* 231; *M,* 60; *SK,* 130; *A,* 170; Ch; *DS,* 159). In *Invitation to a Beheading* the motif is punningly intervowen into Cincinnatus's recollection of the "green, turfy tamarack park" (19) where he used to meet with his wife (i.e. in "Tamara Gardens" [*ibid*]), and in *Ada* it is given a distinctly self-parodic ring. The development of Van's and Ada's romance is accompanied by various echoes of Lermontov's *Demon,* and also their father – "Demon Veen" – is seen entertaining himself with a "temporary Tamara" (180).[14] Finally, to clinch the series, Vadim's first published novel in *Look at the Harlequins!* is outright entitled "Tamara" (cf. "Other Books by the Narrator").

(ix) The self-parodic overtones are even more evident when Vadim glimpses "the façade of a house on Gertsen Street" (*LH!,* 211) during his trip to present-day Leningrad. Sensing a vague familiarity, he surmises that he "may have gone there to some children's fête ages ago" (*ibid*). Children's fêtes are commemorated also in *Speak, Memory* (203–4), and in another instance the author has given his former home address as:

> [10] [. . .] St. Petersburg (now Leningrad), 47, Morskaya (now Hertzen Street) [. . .]
> (109; the substitution of "Gertsen" by "Hertzen" is due to vagaries in Russian transliteration)

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13. Cf. also "*Pis'ma*":
> *Vot pis'ma, vse – tvoi* [. . .]
> [. . .] *noch'ju – vyletajut,*
> *poluprozrachnye i slabye, skol'zjat*
> *i v'jutsja nado mnoj, kak babochki* [. . .]
> [*Here are the letters – they are all yours [. . .]/[. . .] by night they fly out [of a locker],/ half-transparent and weak, they crawl/up to me and curl, like butterflies]
> (*Stikhi* 1979, 85)

This image, first occurring in a poem dated "23.1.23" (*ibid*), is faithfully transferred into *Speak, Memory:*

> [Tamara's letters] would search there for a fugitive addressee, and weakly flap about like bewildered butterflies set loose in an alien zone at the wrong altitude, among an unfamiliar flora.
> (251)

And *Mary:*

> [Mary's and Ganin's] letters managed to pass across the terrible Russia of that time – like a cabbage white butterfly flying over the trenches.
> (*M,* 91)

14. The heroine of Lermontov's poem was likewise called "Tamara". For the allusion cf. KARLINSKY 1971, 10, 12; PROFFER 1974b, 260–1.

There is no need to expand the listing here, although dozens of analogous instances might well be added. The notion of fictive protagonists attending fêtes given by their creator is wholly anomalous, of course, but precisely such effects are regularly manipulated by VN in his fiction. Being part of a larger correlation-series between the author's public biography and his separate texts, these occurrences disclose a *double function.* While inoperative when read in the context of a single fiction, providing merely "local color" (the ramshackle chess sets in [i], the "typically Russian" portrait in [ii], and so forth), they receive a new motivation when placed into the overall framework of the author's writings. Besides referring to the intrinsic world of a given text, the above instances also foreground the presence of an authorial *persona* behind the entire literary enterprise, freely selecting his materials from a stock of authentic experience. It is this ambiguity, the teasing suggestion of the author's "real life" showing through the real-seeming fiction, that poses a special challenge when we attempt studying VN's narratives against the backdrop of his larger literary output.

On Public *Persona*

It would appear, then, that two conceptions of "author", or of authorial biography, come to the fore in approaching the Nabokovian production.

(i) In the first case, it is indicated by VN that the private life of a fiction-writer is always unknowable, and ultimately irrelevant in appraising the literary qualities of his output. (As the author says, a biographic approach to Pushkin would end up in merely "blurring the authentic [. . .] methods of a genius" [*EO* 2, 229].)

(ii) On the other hand, the notion of a writer's public image (*persona*) as a separate entity is postulated. Unlike (i), this image is purely a construction, or a composite of intertextual relations, the specific properties of which may be induced only from the author's own writing. Rather like any other textual complex, this *persona* may be overtly evoked, alluded to, or treated parodically within the confines of individual fictions.

For these relationships to become operative, it is necessary that separate texts be regarded as elements in a larger literary series created by the author. It is even suggested by VN that once given facts about the author are made public, they cease being part of a merely personal history. As much is said in his opening to the "Mademoiselle"-section in *Speak, Memory,* where the fate of autobiographic motifs is discussed after they have been transferred into fiction. The statement is an important one (it is recapitulated in *Strong Opinions* [12]), for in VN's actual novels the effort to turn private experience into a public, literary fact is flaunted as a quite peculiarly compositional problem:[15]

> [11] I have often noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item of my past, it would pine away in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it. Although it lingered on in my mind, its personal warmth, its

15. Compare also PJATIGORSKIJ (1978, 313), who relates this question to the well-known stylistic concept of *ostranenie* (i.e. "defamiliarization"). According to him, VN's method of manipulating autobiographic elements in his novels constitutes a distinctly Nabokovian mode of defamiliarization. This is to my mind a shrewd observation, and I shall follow it up in the next pages.

> retrospective appeal had gone and, presently, it became more closely identified with my novel than with my former self, where it had seemed to be so safe from the intrusion of the artist.
> (95)

As such, the status assigned to an author's public self is an ancient topic in literary theory, although proponents of textual "autonomy" have tended to downplay its importance. The question is particularly well documented with regard to Slavic literature, and – as VN surely knew – some of the most pertinent suggestions come from Russian Formalist theoreticians.[16]

In a classic discussion, TOMASHEVSKIJ has expressly distinguished between "real" (i.e. private) biography and biography as a "literary" construction. He writes:

> Obviously, the question of the role of biography in literary history cannot be solved uniformly for all literatures. There are writers with biographies and writers without biographies. [. . .] [F]or a writer with a biography, the facts of the author's life must be taken into consideration. Indeed, in the works themselves the juxtaposition of the texts and the author's biography plays a structural role. [. . .] Thus the biography that is useful to the literary historian is not the author's curriculum vitae or the investigator's account of his life. *What the literary historian really needs is the biographical legend created by the author himself.* Only such a legend is a *literary fact.*
> (1923, 55; the first emphasis is mine, the second is in the text)

A largely similar view is expressed by TYNJANOV (1924, 26–8) in his comments on the notion of "*literaturnaja lichnost'*" (our *persona*), or in his remark that during certain periods of Russian literature facts concerning the author's background have themselves gained the status of *"oral, apocryphic literature" (1927, 44). Particular writers who have been considered from this standpoint include modernists like Blok (EJKHENBAUM 1921), Rozanov (TOMASHEVSKIJ 1923, 54), Pasternak (ERLICH 1959, 325–6 *passim*), Belyj (for a good overview cf. PESONEN 1983) – or Majakovskij, whose fate gave occasion to a deft reversal of the standard biographic cant in JAKOBSON: it is *"only in [the] context of [Majakovskij's] poetry" (1931, 10) that one may hope to understand the specific features of his life as well.[17] The paradigmatic example is again provided by Pushkin who, as has been often noted in criticism, managed to bring forth an entirely textualized version of his biography (e.g. TOMASHEVSKIJ 1923, 50; TYNJANOV 1927, 44; so also VN terms Pushkin an author for whom "life and library were one" [*EO* 2, 151]).

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16. Which does not mean that the notion of *persona* wouldn't be universally applicable in literary studies. As WIMSATT has aptly noted in his remarks on Milton: "[The poet's] career as a public servant does not escape being part of the history of ideas" (1954, 261). Hence the legitimacy of giving this fact of Milton's biography a measure of significance when studying particular instances in his poems. More recently BOOTH has appended to his afore-cited scheme a new level – that of a "Career-Author", by which he wishes to indicate "a composite of the implied authors" occurring in a given author's opus (1983, 431). The latter concept would seem to more or less coincide with the notion that we are driving at here, even though Booth does not say how this composite can be actually manifested in particular works. Nor does he define what is meant by "works".

17. Rather than *vice versa.* This recalls VN's formula on the relationship between "life" and "text" in literature (cf. our chapter on *Pale Fire* [3.2.3.]): "*La vie d'un poete est comme le pastiche de son oeuvre*" ("*Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable*", 367).

I would suggest that VN's deliberate manipulations of autobiographic motifs in his fiction may be best understood against this distinctly Slavic background. American critics have often found occasion to chide the author for a "self-indulgent" concern with his *persona* in his English novels. The uningenious dismissal of *Look at the Harlequins!* by BROYARD may serve to characterize a widespread critical trend:

> Who but Vladimir Nabokov would invent a fictional novelist for the sole purpose of comparing him unfavorably with Vladimir Nabokov? [. . .] While I suppose Mr. Nabokov is up to one of his metaphorical mirror tricks, it seems to me that his sleight of hand has slipped up once again, leaving him in a cruelly exposed position. To say it plainly, the book strikes me as the production of an imagination paralyzed by vanity.
> (1974, 45; for related assessments cf. CHERRY 1975, 715–16; AMIS 1975; RAMPTON 1984, 173–80; LEVY 1984, 123–4)

What is overlooked in such statements[18] is that behind the seemingly flippant play there exists a time-honored literary tradition. A novel like *Look at the Harlequins!* is but a development – to the extreme, it is true – of a practice that was taken up by poets and novelists long before VN launched into his own literary career. The curious fact in VN's case is, of course, that in his texts the status of the author's *persona* is self-consciously elevated into a thematic question affecting the concrete ordering of the narrative. But this is a problem that we shall ponder more thoroughly in the analytic section of the study.

AM Defined

"The Author himself – that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism" – as BARTHES has written – "can or could some day become a text like any other" (1970, 211). This view of a literary personality, of an entire lived life, as nothing if not a "sum" of the author's published writings is quite obviously congenial to the approach that has been sketched here. I shall henceforth adopt the term *author's metatext* (AM) to denote that public image of an author which may be extracted solely from his writings. (That is, the term will be used in a quite literal sense – indicating a "text about texts", or a text that governs all the others.)[19]

What texts can be regarded as legitimate elements in this construction when studying VN's writing? The role of *Speak, Memory* as the pervading Nabokovian metatext was already delineated above. In a similar manner, the author's other public statements, made in his numerous interviews (a representative sampling of which is given in *Strong Opinions*); in the more than twenty Forewords, Introductions, and Postscripts appended to reprintings of his former works; or in his scholarly publications – all partake in the

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18. On the other hand, in a recent essay on the Nabokovian production WHITE has noted quite accurately that "[. . .] it was Nabokov's particular delight to invent sinister or insane or talentless versions of himself, characters who are at least in part mocking anticipations of naive readers' suspicions about the real Nabokov" (1984, 39).

19. For "metatext" cf. e.g. LOTMAN 1973, 344–6; LOTMAN et al. 1973, 83. The term "author's metatext" has previously occurred in a discussion by BROOKE-ROSE (1977, 521 *passim*), who uses it in a somewhat different sense. One might cite here also a well-known pronouncement by FOUCAULT who says that when we speak of an "author" we are in fact referring to "the mode of existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (1975, 608).

formation of the authorial *persona* as a stylized "text" in its own right.[20]

Inevitably, this composite of materials will contain also some marginal instances, only half-fulfilling the condition of being parts in a legend "created by the author himself" (cf. the formulation cited from Tomashevskij above). A case in point is provided by the publication of VN's correspondence with Edmund Wilson in 1979 (*Letters*) – two years after the author himself had died. Quite obviously, these letters couldn't be regarded as belonging to the canon as long as they were kept stocked away in private files. But it might also be claimed that since they are now available to the public, we can no longer ignore them either. No reader can at the present avoid being affected by given passages in *Letters* when forming his conception of the Nabokovian *persona,* and this should also be allowed by our theoretical scheme.[21] The same is true of VN's published lectures (*Lectures 1–3*), even though we are aware that many of them have been restored only posthumously by an academic editor (cf. Forewords by Fredson Bowers to *Lectures 1,* ix–x; *2,* xii–xiii; *3,* x–xi). While initially "public" merely for the handful of participants in VN's lecture-courses at Wellesley and Cornell, these texts enter the general canon with the author's own approval. The first mention of his plan to collect the lectures in a book form occurs as early as in an interview recorded in 1966 (*SO,* 103), and even if VN did not live to finish the project it would be hardly feasible to omit them altogether from a consideration of his literary system.[22]

It is mainly the above group of texts – memoirs, interviews, and criticism – that is here placed alongside VN's properly "literary" production as the backdrop against which his particular narratives may be studied. In conclusion, we should still take note of the veritable jealousy that the author evinced in guarding over the stylized purity of the said *persona.* TOMASHEVSKIJ has mentioned the degree to which Pushkin was "concerned about his 'biography' " (1923, 50), and the description applies to VN's case

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20. VN himself often drew attention to the deliberately stylized quality of all such sources. "The person I usually impersonate in Montreux" (*SO,* 298), he said, referring to the guise donned for the benefit of interviewers flocking his residence throughout the 1960's and 1970's. In one instance he even suggested a precise parallel between his preparations for an interview and the actual process of writing fiction:

    > What I really like about the better kind of public colloquy is the opportunity it affords me *to construct in the presence of my audience the semblance of what I hope is a plausible and not altogether displeasing personality.*
    > (*ibid,* 158; my emphasis)

    The parallel goes even deeper, for as we know VN always insisted that his interviews be conducted through the written medium (cf. *ibid,* xi, 20, 108–9, 120 and *passim*).

21. In fact, we know that the project of publishing the Nabokov-Wilson letters was initiated by VN himself during his lifetime (cf. Simon Karlinsky's Introduction in *Letters,* 2), and even some of the letters carry traces of these plans. (E.g. February 23, 1948: "I think I shall eventually polish this letter and publish it somewhere" [196].) Also TYNJANOV (1921, 28–9), who was careful about these matters, justifies his treatment of Gogol's correspondence by the fact that the letters had been published by the author in *Perepiska s druz'jami.*

22. VN's literary criticism appears in the role of a "metatext" in a twofold sense, for the author often elucidates his own artistic practices by way of commenting on the art of other writers. Examples of this have been seen e.g. in connection with his views on Pushkin (2.2.2.1.) and Lermontov (3.2.1.). Cf. also the hundred-page discourses on Joyce in *Lectures 1* (285–370) and Tolstoj in *2* (137–243).

with a vengeance. It was the author's habit to fend off any approach to his past by critics using sources outside his immediate control. This attitude explains the negative response to Nina Berberova's reminiscences in her "Nabokov in the Thirties" (BERBEROVA 1970a),[23] or the more savage attacks (Letters 1971 and 1972; *SO,* 218–20) against the anecdotes published by Edmund Wilson of his former friend (WILSON 1971). And the same issue, an essential disagreement about legitimate AM, surely underlies also VN's notorious dispute with his first biographer, finally leading to an attempt on the author's part to suppress the publication of the book through legal means. (Cf. FIELD 1977, 27–8. The legal proceedings are mentioned in FIELD [1978], which replies to a letter by D. NABOKOV [1978] on the matter.)

Field's sin, it would seem, consisted of his persistence in using informants not accepted by VN (FIELD 1977, 9, 13–14, 15 and *passim*). Another was his manner of speculating on various parallels between fictive motifs in the author's novels and episodes belonging to his strictly *private* background. There is no legitimacy in the above sense e.g. in Field's conjecture that a fire witnessed by VN in 1923 during his stay in France may have ignited the entire "Night of the Burning Barn" -setting in *Ada* (*ibid,* 203), since the first incident is not documented anywhere in the author's own writing. Similarly the assertion that the sound of traffic close to VN's residence at Montreux "has perhaps been exaggerated in *Transparent Things*" (17) seems to be based on a misunderstanding. There is no way in which the historically authentic milieu can be brought together for comparison with the invented one. (For equally blatant cases cf. also 59, 109, 129, 174, 183, 246.)[24]

One may sympathize with the critics for the rough treatment they have been receiving, but this does not alter the theoretical issue. VN's rejection of his biographers' discoveries need not result merely from "an especial need to be inaccessible to others" (FIELD 1977, 28), for the attitude inheres quite logically in a notion behind his whole literary enterprise: *a view of an author's life as a consciously crafted fiction comparable to any other.* What the author decides to include in this creation is not a psychological choice, but ultimately an artistic one, affecting the immediate context in which his literary achievement can finally be assessed.

4.2.2. Summary

From what was said above it follows that there are three ways in which to approach narrative structure in the author's opus.

(i) The analysis may be limited to concern only the relations existing between N and the world of his narrated history: the categories and types of fictive narrating; the strategies employed in constructing the level of NW; and the role given to agents

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23. "She is much better [. . .] at delineating the characters in my novels than in describing V. Sirin, one of my characters in 'real' life" (*SO,* 290).

24. Similar conjectures abound in SHAKHOVSKAJA (1979), written by one of VN's émigré acquaintances. Liza in *Pnin* is said to have *'something in common with a young woman whom [VN] knew in Berlin" (66); Ferdinand in "Spring in Fialta" is *'somewhat [. . .] like a certain contemporary of [VN]" (64), and so forth. The book came out too late for the author to retaliate.

inhabiting the various levels of embedding. Such were the questions treated in the first three chapters in this study.

(ii) A more comprehensive approach to the narrative text relates (i) to patterns lying beyond the control of fictive N. Questions confronting the analyst at this point will include: What prominence is assigned to the interplay ("indirect communication") between IA and IR in a given text? What are the concrete narrative manifestations of these underlying categories? What is their thematic import? The overall scheme for this type of analysis was presented in *Fig. 5*.

(iii) Thirdly, questions contained in (i) and (ii) can be studied in the light of the notion of AM as it was developed here. Single narratives may be approached not only as autonomous units, but also as constitutive elements in the overriding "text" controlled by the author. Were we to present this notion in still another diagram we would be compelled to include all our previous schemes – from *Fig. 1* to *5* – inside the one master level. The specific relationships existing within such a textual complex will be among the main problems to be treated in our remaining chapters.

In the end, it is suggested that while it is always possible to restrict the discussion to autonomous works, in studying Nabokovian narration it becomes a more rewarding strategy to read – as Fyodor does in *The Gift* – "in three dimensions" (17), considering separate devices both in their intrinsic function and as partaking in the larger intertextual system. Sustained play with the author's dimension in fiction is an unmistakably Nabokovian method, and the study will conclude with remarks on the more problematic aspects of this device.

5

THE PROBLEM OF READER

5.1. *Orientation towards IR: Prestructuring the Text*

5.1.1. The Role of the Reader in Nabokov's Poetics

Nabokov on Reader

The author – the author we know from his texts – was quite explicit about the role allotted to readers in his literary enterprise. Asked in a 1962 interview the standard questions (Whom do you write for? What audience?), VN retorted:

> [1] I don't think that an artist should bother about his audience. His best audience is the person he sees in his shaving mirror every morning. I think that the audience an artist imagines, when he imagines that kind of a thing, is *a room filled with people wearing his own mask.*
> (*SO,* 18; my emphasis)

The opinion was consistently held throughout VN's other public statements (e.g. *SO,* 37, 114, 146; "Reply to My Critics" [*ibid,* 241]). In his last recorded interview the author still underscored that as a writer he is "perfectly indifferent to the capacity and condition of the reader's brain" (Interview 1977, 122).

Moreover, the author's outright insults to his potential readers are well known. In prefacing *The Defense* he wrote:

> [2] In this connection, I would like to spare the time and effort of hack reviewers – and, generally, persons who move their lips when reading and cannot be expected to tackle a dialogueless novel [. . .]
> (Foreword, 8)

In other contexts VN has defined "readerdom" at large as "mere lip-moving ghosts and amnesiacs" (*SO,* 183),[1] heaped scorn on "solemn reader[s] looking for 'general ideas' " (Introduction to *BS,* viii), or lampooned readers of pulp fiction ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L,* 303; *SM,* 11; *NG,* 62) who may have mistakenly laid their hands on a Nabokovian novel. A small essay of its own could be written on the author's persistent manner of deriding the exegetical efforts of many a well-meaning Nabokov-scholar:[2] the

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1. On the whole a negatively-charged motif: in *Pale Fire* it is the arch-thug Gradus who is envisioned reading, "his lips moving like wrestling worms" (274).

2. Despite the claim in *Speak, Memory* of his possessing "an almost pathological and not always justified indifference to reviews" (238–9). In "Reply to My Critics" VN writes that even

early examination of *Lolita* by BUTLER (1960) was harshly dismissed by VN as "jarring and absurd" (*SO,* 96); in a piece occasioned by ROWE (1971a) the critic was asked to "move his belongings" ("Rowe's Symbols" [*SO,* 304]); and even participants in APPEL-NEWMAN (1970), published in honor of VN's seventieth birthday, were on occasion ridiculed in the author's detailed "Anniversary Notes" (*SO,* 288, 289–91 *passim*) – an all but unprecedented case in the annals of *Festschrift*-writing, one would assume.

These and similar maneuvres have elevated VN's alleged "hostility" towards his readers into a legendary fact in Nabokov-criticism. So e.g. KERMODE writes, in a good paper, that "the personality [. . .] presid[ing] over [VN's] work is not amiable [. . .]. [W]e do not much care to be the objects of an author's contempt, and [. . .] that is the way Nabokov seems to feel about us" (1960, 81). Similar notions have been echoed by a host of lesser critics, who often talked of VN's insistence on "hoax[ing]" the reader (PURDY 1968–9, 381; cf. also FURBANK 1965, 84; ENRIGHT 1966, 4; GASS 1968, 4). Perhaps the most influential view was that of WILSON, who repeatedly singled out what he called "*Schadenfreude*" as the most pervasive feature in Nabokovian writing (1971, 161–2). As he formulated this notion in his joint assessment of VN's scholarly and novelistic opus:

> Mr. Nabokov has gone on record [. . .] as explaining that he regards a novel as a kind of game with the reader. [. . .] [This] addiction to *Schadenfreude* [. . .] pervades all his work. *Everybody is always humiliated.*[3]
> (1972, 233, 236; my emphasis)

Nonetheless, it should be understood that the question of "reader" is not so easily resolved, not even in VN's case. Critics often overlook the fact that the author's actual novels may imply rather more complex attitudes than his overtly polemical statements. Professing indifference or hostility towards the reader VN keeps in fact bringing out an acute *concern with the reception of his texts* among the general reading public (even "hostility" might surely be taken as a sign of the same concern.) What a closer examination of VN's narrative strategies will reveal, I propose, is a feature that can be characterized only as a definite type of *reader-consciousness:* a quite remarkable sensitivity towards those responses that belong to the receiving end of the narrative-communication process, ultimately affecting the actual shape that a given text will assume.

Before we move on to specific markers of this concern, let us still notice that some of the author's public *dicta* also include statements in which the receiver's status in fiction becomes further determined. Not unlike some of the narrative theorists cited in our foregoing chapter (4.1.), VN was always careful to differentiate between several *categories* of readers. With regard to Gogol's literary output he once observed:

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though he feels obligated to defend his scholarly output, he "cannot imagine [him]self writing a letter-to-the-editor in reply to an unfavorable review [of his novels]" (*SO,* 241). The promise was not kept in later phases of his career.

3. In his earlier piece, WILSON had already mentioned a "desire both to suffer and make [the reader] suffer" (1965a, 3) as an important element of the author's writing. His view oddly duplicates that of SARTRE who suggested in his review of the French *Despair* that perhaps it is "*par masochisme*" (1939, 60) that VN writes his novels. PROFFER, conversely, calls VN "a somewhat sadistic author" (1968a, 4).

[3] Even in his worst writing Gogol was always good at creating his reader, which is the privilege of great writers. Thus we have a circle, a closed family-circle, one might say. It does not open into the world.
(*NG*, 41)

The essay "Good Readers and Good Writers", which opens *Lectures 1* (1–6), is in its entirety devoted to the question of reader-categorization, and the topic is addressed again in the lecture on Joyce:

[4] [. . .] I need not repeat that every new type of writer evolves a new type of reader; every genius produces a legion of young insomniacs.
(*ibid*, 316)

Related mentions of "the good, the admirable reader"[4] keep recurring in many of the inbuilt reading-instructions appended by VN to his own works. "Good readers will not fail to distinguish" the parodistic patterning in *King, Queen, Knave* (Foreword, viii). "Wise readers" will refrain from a biographic approach to *Glory* (Foreword, xiv). "Intelligent readers" of the poem "Lilith" will abstain from facile comparisons between the early piece and the author's later writing (*PP*, 55). The concluding remarks to VN's book on Gogol' amount to a veritable shooing-away of "the wrong sort of reader" (*NG*, 149) and an attendant invitation to "the right sort – my brothers, my doubles" (149–50).

Hence it is seen that the author conceives of his readerdom as a many-faceted construction, always determined by the specific properties of a given text. If, as BOOTH has said, "the reader and author [are] intended to stand [. . .] firmly and securely together" (1974, 233) in narrative fiction, the Nabokovian definition of readers as his own "doubles" (*"an enormous sympathetic hallful of one's doubles" in Postscript to *L R* [299])[5] becomes less a show of arrogance than a theoretical statement on the preconditions of any successful reading. It is in the same sense that the notion of one's ideal audience as the person seen "in [the] shaving mirror" (above ex. [1]) can be best understood.[6] For insisting that the reader should identify "not with the boy or the girl in the book, but with the mind that conceived and composed the book" (*Lectures 2*, 11) VN is doing no less than urging his audience to reject the position of the wrong kind, the lip-moving kind, of reader and to share directly in the author's creative vision.

The outline of the narrative strategy called forth by the latter conception has been aptly described by VN in a famous passage from his memoir. In a characteristic fashion, the excerpt is once again couched as a meditation on the art of the chess-problemist (for previous remarks on the analogy between chess and narrative-making cf. above 2.3.3.):

[5] I remember one particular problem I had been trying to compose for months. There came a night when I managed at last to express that particular theme. It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the

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4. This is from the introductory essay to *Lectures 2* ("Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers", 11). Cf. also: "[. . .] of all the characters that a great artist creates, his readers are the best" (*ibid*).

5. "*Kak chitatel', ja umeju razumnozhat'sja beskonechno i legko mogu nabit' ogromnyj otzyvchivyj zal svoimi dvojnikami*". In a somewhat similar fashion, Fyodor in *The Gift* envisions the readers of his first verse collection: "He imagined a roomful of these people (like a meeting of stockholders – 'readers of Godunov-Cherdyntsev')" (150).

6. One may be reminded here of the view by BAKHTIN that *"the ideal reader" of a literary work is but "a mirror of the author" (1975, 204).

problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple, 'thetic' solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one. The latter would start by falling for an illusory pattern of play based on a fashionable avant-garde theme (exposing White's King to checks), which the composer had taken the greatest pains to 'plant' (with only one obscure little move by an inconspicuous pawn to upset it). Having passed through this 'antithetic' inferno the by now ultrasophisticated solver would reach the simple key move (bishop to c2) as somebody on a wild goose chase might go from Albany to New York by way of Vancouver, Eurasia and the Azores. The pleasant experience of the roundabout route (strange landscapes, gongs, tigers, exotic customs, the thrice-repeated circuit of a newly married couple around the sacred fire of an earthen brazier) would amply reward him for the misery of the deceit, and after that, his arrival at the simple key move would provide him with a synthesis of poignant artistic delight.
(*SM*, 291–2)

Quite similarly, it will be seen once and again in the following discussion, VN's literary narratives are composed as multi-levelled games with potential "solvers".[7] Constantly playing varying degrees of decoding skills – varying degrees of "sophistication" – against each other in his fiction, the author is also pointing towards those strategies that his readers should follow in tackling the particular narrative problems. After all, to modify the previously-cited claims by VN's more hostile critics, not "everybody" is being humiliated in Nabokovian narration – only those who fail to take on the role offered to them through the properties of the narrative text.[8]

Reader as a Theme

Our impression of the author's reader-consciousness becomes enhanced if we look at formulations occurring in his literary texts. VN's fictive protagonists, N-agents, C-agents, or the lyrical speakers in his poems, are regularly confronted with the task of finding a public for their verbal inventions. In these cases, we may single out a veritable "theme" of the receiver, manifested in diverse ways throughout the author's production.

To my mind, one of the most explicit treatments of this concern appears in the long, 124-line poem "Fame", composed in its entirety as a meditation on literary afterlife (*PP*, 102–13). The speaker is an exiled Russian novelist who is for the moment preoccupied with a quite tangible "problem [. . .]/of contacting the reader's awareness"

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7. In its most concise form the game-analogy occurs in *Pale Fire*, when Kinbote exhorts the reader of his Commentary to "go to square 209" (in a note preceding the one on Shade's line 209 [163]).

8. This is why we shall insist in the following on keeping the basic narratological categories apart, for otherwise it soon becomes impossible to tell just who is addressing whom in a narrative passage. The latter is what more or less happens in a chapter entitled "Ideal and Scandalous Readers" in WEILER (1977, 16–22), where no attempt is made to differentiate between readers addressed by the author outside his fiction and those evoked by N-agents inside Nabokovian novels. Also ROWE includes in his study a chapter carrying the title "Reader Participation" (1971a, 61–72), but it turns out to have little to do with the reader as a narrative property; his notion of "evocative details that enlist the reader's participation" (62) appears to denote *any* verbal figuration that has attracted the analyst's own attention. A more pertinent approach is suggested by TAMIR-GHEZ (1979) who provides some very valuable insights on the uses of N- and Ne-agents in the narrative design of *Lolita*. I shall return to her findings in the latter half of this chapter. Otherwise the question of the receiver's end in Nabokovian fiction has remained unanalyzed in scholarship.

(ll. 78–9; 109). His musings have been set in motion by a ghoulish visitor (a figment of his own imagination [cf. ll. 5–8; 103]) who cynically mocks the speaker's dreams of a future fame. Compare:

[6] 'Your poor books', he breezily said, 'will finish
by hopelessly fading in exile. Alas,
those two thousand leaves of frivolous fiction
will be scattered; but genuine foliage has

a place where to fall: there's the soil, there's Russia,
there's a path drenched by maples in violet blood,
there's a threshold where lie overlapping gold aces,
there are ditches; but your unfortunate books

without soil, without path, without ditch, without treshold,
will be shed in a void where you brought a branch
as bazaar fakirs do (that is, without faking),
and not long will it bloom in the smoke-colored air.

Who, some autumn night, *who,* tell us, please, in the backwoods
of Russia, by lamplight, in his overcoat,
amidst cigarette gills, miscellaneous sawdust,
and other illumined indiscernibles – who

on the table a sample of *your* prose will open,
absorbed, will read *you* to the noise of the rain,
to the noise of the birch tree that rushes up windowward
and to its own level raises the book?

No, never will anyone in the great spaces
make mention of even one page of your work;
the now savage will dwell in his savage ignorance,
friends of steppes won't forget their steppes for your sake.'
(ll. 53–76; 107–9; emphases in the text)

These lines were written in 1942, two years after the author's own migration from Europe and his decision to begin publishing his work in English. (The qualms caused by the switch are recorded e.g. in VN's letters of January 5 and August 9, 1942 [cf. *Letters,* 55–6, 69].) Similar sentiments are voiced also in "The Poets" (*PP,* 92–5), "To Russia (*ibid,* 96–9), "No Matter How" (*ibid,* 126–7), or "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (*ibid,* 158–63), each of them dating from the same period and dealing with the speaker's "disavowal of language" (a phrase from the first text [l. 31; *ibid,* 95]).

The autobiographic overtones are quite as evident in some later lyrics dealing with the reception of particular texts. "What Is the Evil Deed" was written by VN on occasion of the scandal caused among the reading public by his best-known novel (the poem came out one year after the first American printing of *Lolita*):

[7] What is the evil deed I have committed?
Seducer, criminal – is this the word
for me who set the entire world a-dreaming
of my poor little girl?

Oh, I know well that I am feared by people:
They burn the likes of me for wizard wiles
and as of poison in a hollow smaragd
of my art die.
(ll 1–8; *PP,* 147)

Still "*Akh, ugonjat* [. . .]" (*Stikhi* 1979, 299), apparently prompted by the adverse reception afforded in American press to *Look at the Harlequins!*, well attests to the author's continued concern with responses elicited from the reader:

[8] *Akh, ugonjat ikh v step', Arlekinov moikh,*
v bueraki, k chuzhim atamanam!
Geometriju ikh, Veneciju ikh
nazovut shutovstvom i obmanom.

[*O, they are being driven out to the steppe, those Harlequins of mine,/into the ravines, to the arms of foreign atamans!/Their geometry, their Venice-like circles/ are being called buffoonery and deception]

These are examples from VN's lyrical verse. It might be facile to discern in all such declarations evidence of the author's real-life experience, but it would be folly to take them entirely in earnest. The voices employed in these excerpts still belong to *invented* speakers. Our main interest here is in the light that they may throw on certain properly narratological questions.[9]

What is more, in choosing the themes for his poems VN was also appropriating a venerable literary convention. Concern about potential receivers has always functioned as a prominent topic in Russian letters. It found an expression already in the well-known lyric by Baratynskij, where the poet addresses his words not to a contemporary audience but to a "future reader" ("*daljokij moj potomok*"),[10] and the theme has since then kept reverberating from analogous instances in Pushkin to the work of such modernists as Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, or Pasternak.[11] In fact, the supposedly personal lines from "Fame" (above ex. [6]) turn out to be a direct parody of the following passage from Pushkin's "*Exegi monumentum*" (itself a parody, as VN gleefully points out in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, of compositions by previous writers [*EO* 2, 310]). In VN's own translation:

[9] Tidings of me will cross the whole great Rus,
and name me will each tribe existing there:
proud scion of Slavs, and Finn, and the now savage
Tungus, and – friend of steppes – the Kalmuck.[12]
(From a note appended to *PP* [113]; the translation appears in full in *EO* 2, 311)

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9. This is not to say that VN's experience as an émigré author wouldn't have been "real" enough. Like other writers in exile, he was compelled to address his art to foreign audiences for the better part of his career. It is therefore not difficult to conceive that the sense of cultural isolation expressed in texts like "Fame" or "An Evening of Russian Poetry" was also shared by the author behind the fiction. The overall plight of Russian émigré artists since the end of the 1920's has been well documented e.g. in the accounts by ANDREEV 1972, 24–9 and R. WILLIAMS 1972, 322–3 *passim*. VN was confronted by the same dilemma, but as will be noticed he was among those writers who succeeded in turning it into a strictly *literary fact* in his narrative fiction.

10. Literally: *"my distant descendant". Cf. the lyric "*Moj dar ubog i golos moj ne gromok*" (BARATYNSKIJ 1828).

11. For a very thorough discussion of Akhmatova's poetry from this standpoint cf. VAN DER ENG-LIEDMEIER 1984, esp. 112–29. For examples from Pushkin I refer to a separate study by PEURANEN 1978, esp. 195–223. The overall manifestations of this concern in Russian literature have been discussed by LOTMAN et al., 1973, 65–7.

12. A few years prior to the publication of "Fame" the Pushkin-subtext had already been

The motif of a "steppe" inhabited by hordes of illiterates was evoked by VN also in his afore-cited lyric on reviewers of *Look at the Harlequins!* (above ex. [8]). Even the lamentations constituting the opening lines of "What Is the Evil Deed" (ex. [7]) disclose a somewhat audacious literary travesty – the suggestion behind all such parodic manipulations evidently being that their creator could not care less for the notions he has here chosen to burlesque.[13]

And still, the author's numerous disclaimers notwithstanding, the concern provides an inherent motivation for certain distinctive strategies in Nabokovian writing. "Under the mask of high mummery" – as VN has himself said of Pushkin – the author "smuggles in his private truth" (*EO* 2, 310). It is not solely for the sake of parody that one of VN's early poems was already addressed to a "future reader" – or an as yet "unborn reader" ("*Nerodivshemusja chitatelju*")[14] – for similar evocations keep recurring also in much of his subsequent fiction. The theme may resurface in a subsidiary form, as in *Laughter in the Dark*, where Udo Conrad speculates in passing on his literary afterlife: "It'll be a long time – a solid century, perhaps – before I am appreciated at my worth. That is, if the art of writing and reading is not quite forgotten by then [. . .]" (139). It may be given a shrewdly self-parodic ring – e.g. in Humbert Humbert's address to *his* future readers, purportedly perusing the text only "in the first years of 2000 A.D." (*L*, 291). But the same concern may also be presented as the main motivating force behind the narrative. In "Tyrants Destroyed" the persecuted teller expressly concludes his chronicle with the hope that the text –

> [10] [. . .] will reach other men, neither tomorrow nor the next day, but at a distant time when the world has a day or so of leisure for archeological diggings.
> (*TD*, 36)

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employed by VN in *The Gift:*

> 'Fame?' interrupted Koncheyev. 'Don't make me laugh. [. . .] [A] great deal of time will have to elapse before the Tungus and the Kalmuk [. . .] begin to tear out of each other's hands my 'Communication', with the Finn looking enviously on'.
> (323)

We notice that VN persisted in evoking the figure of Pushkin in his discussions of literary afterlife. When in Postscript to the Russian *Lolita* he purports to view his future readers through *"a magic crystal ball" ("*v moem magicheskom kristalle igrajut radugi*" [*L* R, 299]) this, too, harks back to Pushkin. Cf. the following ruminations in the concluding stanza to *Onegin:* "*I dal' svobodnogo romana/Ja skvoz' magicheskij kristal/Eshcho ne jasno razlichal*" (Eight: L: ll. 12–14; *EO* 4, 280). In *Look at the Harlequins!*, it is the fictive novelist Vadim who envisions a conference with a present-day Russian reader. The meeting is to take place, he says, on a park bench close to a statue of Pushkin: "Dora was supposed to be sitting on Pushkin's left, *id est* my right" (211).

13. Compare Pasternak's poem "*Nobelevskaja premija*", composed in the midst of the controversy caused by his *Doktor Zhivago*. The novel was published in USA the same year as *Lolita*, and the two books kept competing for the first rung on bestseller-lists until the end of the 1950's. The specific source for VN's parody in ex. [7] occurs in the opening lines of Pasternak's third stanza; for obvious reasons, 'girl' was substituted by VN for the original 'land':

> *Chto zhe sdelal ja za pokost',*
> *Ja ubica i zlodej?*
> *Ja ves' mir zastavil plakat'*
> *Nad krasoj zemli moej?*
> (PASTERNAK 1959, 108)

14. The 1930 poem was included in *Stikhi* 1979 under the title "*Budushchemu chitatelju*" (232).

The latter setting is taken to its extreme in *Invitation to a Beheading,* as Cincinnatus embarks on his search for any sounding-board to his literary musings. As he maintains in his prison diary, there would be no use in "laboring for the reader existing today", since "there is in the world not a single human who can speak [Cincinnatus's] language; or, more simply, not a single human who can speak; or, even more simply, not a single human" (95). These are notions that are not too far removed from those expressed in VN's own voice in the previous quotations (i.e. exs. [1]–[2]). The deeply emblematic conclusion of *Invitation to a Beheading* – depicting the hero's first contact with other humans – renders a thematized version of the concern that we shall next examine with regard to concretely narrative patterning:

> [11] [. . .] amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood *beings akin to him.*
> (223; my emphasis)

5.1.2. Markers of Prestructuring Surveyed

5.1.2.1. On Prestructuring

There exist several ways in which the overall orientation towards the receiver may be activated in particular narratives. In a seminal essay, JAKOBSON has referred to manifestations of what he terms the "conative" function in a literary text (1960, 355). Here the discussion is limited to strictly linguistic forms – such as the imperative or the vocative – that signal an interplay between the utterer and his projected addressee. More recently, narrative theorists have introduced the notion of *prestructuring* to cover other signs of this relationship besides the most obviously linguistic ones. That questions also bearing on the cultural background and beliefs of the addressee may come to the fore in decoding narrative texts in usefully underlined by ISER when he writes:

> [T]he role of the reader [in a narrative] is fulfilled through the continual instigation of attitudes and reflections on those attitudes. As the reader is maneuvred into this position, his reactions – which are, so to speak, prestructured by the written text – bring out the meaning of the novel.
> (1972, 31–2; cf. also xii, 45–6, 48–9 *passim*)

Essentially the same notion is summarized by RIMMON-KENAN in her concise definition of "reader" as –

> both an image of a certain competence brought to the text [. . .] from the outside [. . .] and a structuring of such a competence within the text.
> (1983, 118; cf. 115–29)

Related formulations have been often reiterated in modern narratological research (e.g. STERNBERG 1978, 46–55; CHATMAN 1978, 257–8; ECO 1979, 7–11; PRINCE 1980; NØJGAARD 1984; varieties of the approach are traced in more detail by SULEIMAN 1980).

When markers of such interplay remain *covert* we have mainly to do with a communicative process taking place between "the author" (in our sense of IA) and a reader "implied" by the text (IR). As it was argued earlier, contact between the two extrinsic agents can occur only indirectly, behind the backs as it were of the visible speakers and addressees in the narrative. In the case that the communication is made

overt it will be understood as an instance of a separate N addressing his fictive Ne-agents on an intrinsic level of the narrative text (cf. the above schematization in *Fig. 5* [4.1.]).

5.1.2.2. On "Hidden Polemic"

In the present survey, our principal concern will be with the covert variety of markers. Let us, however, first notice some particular instances in which the anticipated responses of the receiver are *explicitly acknowledged* in the narrative. The following are rather extreme cases of what BAKHTIN used to denote as a "hidden polemic" constructed within narrative discourse (1929, 123).[15] By taking them up here I wish to somewhat specify the narrative phenomenon that we are about to tackle in this chapter.

An exemplary instance comes again from VN's memoiristic narration. In a section from Chapter Two of *Speak, Memory* the author discourses at an excessive length – or so it would seem – on his subjective system of *audition colorée*. The comprehensive discussion runs on for several paragraphs (cf. 34–6). Half-way into this peculiar catalogue, however, VN interposes with a separate parenthesis:

> [12] I hasten to complete my list *before I am interrupted.*
> (35; my emphasis)

In a subsequent passage he goes on to concede that "[the] confessions of a synesthete must sound tedious and pretentious to those who are protected from such leakings and drafts by more solid walls than [his] are" (*ibid*) – hence also slyly countering the objections voiced by the hypothetical audience. It is perhaps not out of mere tedium that the reader may disagree with the author's idiosyncratic vision, but rather because of a poorly developed artistic sensitivity. For, if the prosaic readers had their way ("interrupt[ing]" the author), would any of the narrative have been written in the first place?

This rhetorical formula, a precise illustration of Bakhtin's "internally polemical speech – speech that is aware of another and an antagonistic speech act",[16] proves to be a productive one in VN's fiction. Nabokovian N-agents are kept acutely, almost pathologically, aware of the hostile responses that their discourse may ignite in the receivers. This occurs in *Lolita,* where Humbert Humbert's attempts to prove his case (his "unselfish love" for Lolita) to the hypothetical audience – the incredulous court of jurors – almost amount to a parody of the author's own defense of his synesthetic capacity in ex. [12]. As above, the audience's rejection of the presented views will result in an interruption of the narrative act altogether:

> [13] You may jeer at me, and threaten to clear the court, but until I am gagged and half-throttled, I will shout my poor truth. I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita [. . .]
> (270–1)

In *Despair,* the narrative is based to a still greater extent on Hermann's recognition of

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15. "Any literary word is more or less keenly aware of its listener, reader, or critic, and reflects in itself his anticipated objections, assessments and points of view" (1963, 163). This is a quite exact formulation of the notion that was to gain currency only several decades later in the non-Slavic branch of narratology.

16. I take the translated passage from MATEJKA-POMORSKA 1971, 188. See also BAKHTIN 1963, 163.

those objections that his tale is bound to occasion. In this regard, the novel emerges as a perfect reapplication of the Dostoevskian narrative method as it was described by Bakhtin. Commenting on *Notes from the Underground* he writes:

> The extreme and acute interior dialogization is the first thing to amaze us in the 'underground man's' confession [. . .]. From the very first sentence the hero's speech begins to cringe and crack under the influence of the anticipated word of the other person, with which he, from the very first step, enters into a most intense interior polemic.
> (BAKHTIN 1963, 190)

In the case of *Despair* an obviously parodic motivation underlies the adopted method.[17] Here are some characteristic instances of such parodically undercut dialogues – concerning e.g. the reader's responses towards the narrated history:

> [14] You smile, gentle reader? And indeed, why should you not smile?[18]
> (45)

> [15] Stop short, you people – I raise a huge white palm like a German policeman, stop! No sighs of compassion, people, none whatever. Stop, pity! I do not accept your sympathy [. . .]
> (187)

Concerning the narrating person:

> [16] No, I have not gone mad. I am merely producing gleeful little sounds. The kind of glee one experiences upon making an April fool of someone. And a damned good fool I *have* made of someone. Who is he? Gentle reader, look at yourself in the mirror [. . .]
> (34; Hermann's emphasis)

> [17] No, I am not getting in the least excited; my self-control is perfect.[19]
> (39)

Or concerning the quality of the narrative discourse itself:

> [18] It may look as if I do not know how to start. [. . .]. It roars, gathers speed, will presently vanish irrevocably around the corner, the bus, the motorbus, the mighty montibus of my tale. Rather bulky imagery this.
> (13–14)

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17. Noticeably, even Hermann Karlovich is made to acknowledge the parody in his remark on "the dark Dostoevskian stuff" (215) contained in his narrative. He also jokingly takes up his own "grotesque resemblance to Rascalnikov" (199), later suggesting an apt alternative title for the work: "Crime and Pun" (211). I have referred to VN's hostile attitude towards the Dostoevskian conception of the novel in 2.2.1. From *Lectures 2* we learn that *Notes from the Underground* was among the works discussed in the author's lecture-course on Russian literature – he used to lampoon the novel as "Memoirs from a Mousehole" (115–25: cf. also *Letters* [March 24, 1957], 311).

18. Cf. in this connection Humbert Humbert:
> O Reader! Laugh not [. . .]
> (*L*, 180)
In her article TAMIR-GHEZ (1979, 80) has cited this passage to illustrate a rather similar point. One might notice that the narrative in *Lolita* also includes parodies of "Dostoevskian" devices. Akin to Hermann, Humbert in fact singles out his "Dostoevskian grin" (70).

19. Humbert Humbert:
> This is all very interesting, and I dare say you see me already frothing at the mouth in a fit; but no, I am not; I am just winking happy thoughts into a little tiddle cup.
> (*L*, 21)

[19] Very mediocre stuff, I know that myself.
(118)

[20] I know, I know: it is a bad mistake from the novelist's point of view that in the whole course of my tale there is – as far as I remember – so very little attention devoted to what seems to have been my leading motive; greed of gain.
(187)

Such overtly polemical addresses should not be confused with the communication taking place between IA and IR in the cited excerpts. Humbert Humbert's plea is not directed towards readers of the actual novel. Nor are Hermann's words in exs. [14]–[20] to be taken at their face value by the reader, for contrary to his protestations he *has* gone mad; many of the claims put forward in his narrative turn out to be false; and the entire embedded discourse comes out as "very mediocre stuff" indeed. These are some of the implications that the author of *Despair* requires the reader to infer from the claims uttered by his cringing, self-deluding N. (I shall return to the pattern of indirect communication in *Despair* in a separate chapter. Below 6.1.3.).

But at the same time, both Hermann's and Humbert's concern with their addressees may be taken to stand for a larger tendency in all Nabokovian narration. In a typical novel by the author, hidden assumptions about the reader, his responses, background, or his overall capacity to decode the textual design, are continuously elevated into a distinct structural feature. The reader's responses need not always be polemicized against in the text, but they must always be *taken into account* in its ordering. We shall now take up the literally "hidden" (i.e. implied) signs of this particular mode of prestructuring.

5.1.2.3. Covert Markers

If, as BARTHES has maintained, a successful "author" is not the one "who invents the most beautiful stories", but rather "the one who achieves the greatest mastery over the code he shares with his audience" (1966, 264), it becomes imperative that the text include markers enabling the reader to go about his task of decoding. The topic is addressed also by ECO when he writes that "[to] make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader" (1979, 7). In other words, certain assumptions concerning the reader's mastery over the authorial codes must be in one way or another built into the structure of the narrative text.

This problem, while present in all narrative literature, gains special prominence in Nabokovian fiction. Due to historical circumstances, a large portion of VN's novelistic opus has been quite concretely transported from one cultural milieu to another. Russian texts, initially written for an audience sharing a common émigré background, have been later reissued in an English format by the author. In one case – that of the Russified *Lolita* – a novel originally aimed at the Anglo-American public was translated by VN back to his native language. In either instance, the new groups of readers clearly lack familiarity with the milieu, attitudes, or language used as materials in the initial version, and this change is seen to affect also the internal ordering of the text.

VN himself often referred to the problem of "codes" in his comments on the translated novels. In prefacing *Glory* he expressly laments the disappearance of "the unconscious precision of the common knowledge [held] by the Russian *intelligent* who

was the main reader of [his] books [throughout the 1920's and 1930's]" (Foreword, xii).[20] In Foreword to *The Gift*, he explains that it is "the participation of so many Russian muses" (8) that makes the text all but untranslatable into English. And even in Introduction to *Mary*, one of the author's least revised translations, he singles out various additions of "brief utilitarian phrases [. . .] alluding to routine Russian matters (obvious to fellow-émigrés but incomprehensible to foreign readers)" (iii).

In a similar manner, the explanatory note accompanying "Torpid Smoke" draws attention to the need for elucidating cultural and geographical matters –

> [21] – unfamiliar today not only to foreign readers but to the incurious granchildren of the Russians who fled to Western Europe in the first three or four years after the Bolshevist Revolution.
> (*RB*, 26)

This, it appears to me, is a quite accurate description of IR evoked through the series of revisions implanted in the author's translated texts: readers only vaguely familiar – or not familiar at all – with the manifold codes appropriated in structuring the narrative. Accordingly, in the revised version of "Torpid Smoke" an ignorance of the entire Russian émigré way of life is anticipated:

> [22] At intervals scraps of indistinct, laconic speech came from the adjacent parlor (*the cavernal centerpiece of one of those bourgeois flats which Russian émigré families used to rent in Berlin at the time*), separated from his room by sliding doors, through whose ripply mat glass the tall lamp beyond shone yellow [. . .]
> (27–8; my emphasis: the explanatory parenthesis does not occur in TS R [cf. *VF*, 76], which anticipates a better-informed audience)

What constitutes the problem to be surveyed in the following, is the nature and range of instances such as ex. [22] in Nabokovian writing. On occasion, it appears that VN resented the necessity of specifying covert meanings for the reader. Commenting in *Speak, Memory* on certain, supposedly unnoticed, allusions in the text he stated that "it is most embarrassing for a writer to have to point out such things himself" (15). On the other hand, a quite detailed image of IR in particular narratives by the author is reconstructible on basis of such reader-addressed interpolations.[21] Since, in Bakhtin's terms, "the dialogue [with readers] goes to the very core, into every word of the novel" (BAKHTIN 1963, 34), even the most incidental properties in narrative discourse may become pertinent to the question. This general observation can be used as a basis for our own survey.

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20. In a note appended to "A Slice of Life" VN playfully delimits the intended audience still further. In a burlesque auto-interview he writes:
> What was your purpose, sir, in penning this story, forty years ago in Berlin? Well, I did pen it [. . .]; but I had never any "purpose" in mind when writing stories – for myself, my wife, and half a dozen dear dead chuckling friends."
> (*DS*, 140)

21. It is a measure of VN's success in using these devices that critics have already contrasted him with more "difficult" writers like Joyce, who are said to employ "a complex cultural setting, requiring from the reader a social background Nabokov never demands" (ROSS 1979b, 392). More precisely, we should maintain that in many works by VN the underlay of cultural allusions is quite as dense as in *Ulysses*, but unlike with Joyce the allusions are often *explained within the bounds of the actual narrative.*

It is a common case in literary narratives that "local color" is added to the text by aid of foreign or otherwise exotic phrases.[22] In such instances, the text often contains inbuilt clues to the meaning of these phrases, included for the benefit of the potential, linguistically naive reader. (For a list of related examples from world literature cf. PRINCE 1980, 230–2.)

As regards VN's narratives, the standard technique may occur in an entirely "straight" fashion – the depicted émigré milieus being exotic enough from the standpoint of any present-day reader – but also with a more or less flagrantly ironic turn. The first case will be studied here as *direct* communication between the sending and receiving poles in a narrative passage. The second, a more complex process, will be regarded as *indirect* communication, for ironic undercuttings always call forth additional levels in the sender-receiver relationship.

(i) *Direct Communication.*

> [23] *'Spasibo* (thanks)', she said quite soundlessly: the outline of the word could only be guessed from the movement of her plump pale lips.
> (*Gl*, 93)

The introduction of the elementary Russian phrase in ex. [23], with the attendant reader-addressed translation, illustrates a basic feature in VN's use of foreign phrases. It is not for the sake of mere exoticism that such locutions are being brought into the narrative (although the charge has sometimes been levelled),[23] for in its context the Russianism turns out to be wholly functional. The entire small passage, displaying orchestration of sibilants ("she said [. . .] soundlessly") as well as plosives ("plump pale lips"), deftly imitates the phonetic outline of *spasibo* itself, and this effect could be suggested to the reader only by quoting the original key phrase of the sentence.

Dozens of similar instances could be collected from other parts of the canon.[24] Fyodor's musing in *The Gift* on the bilingual pun concealed inside the name of his Berlin landlady – "Klara Stoboy" – are accompanied by a detailed commentary for the benefit of the non-Russian reader:

> [24] [. . .] [her] name [. . .] sounded [. . .] to a Russian's ear [. . .] with sentimental firmness as 'Klara is with thee (*s toboy*)'.
> (15; cf. *G* R [13] for the original passage, containing another kind of explanation)

In *The Eye*, it is assumed that besides Russian the reader knows no German either – or

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22. We have already discussed this technique in 2.1.2.3. as a device for introducing traces of C-agent's discourse into passages of otherwise straightforward ND. Here, the question will be looked into with a view of elucidating the communicative process between IA and the corresponding level of IR.

23. E.g. the censure of "polyglot conversations, which turn out, when put into English, to be perfectly commonplace" by WILSON 1972, 237.

24. An analogous play with another Russian equivalent of 'thank you' occurs in *The Eye:*
> Certain things – for example, the word *'blagodarstvuyte'* ('thank you'), pronounced without the usual slurring, in full, thus retaining its bouquet of consonants – were bound to reveal to the perceptive observer that Smurov belonged to the best St. Petersburg society.
> (41–2)

is otherwise so obtuse as not to discern the pun without some additional prodding. Characteristically, the original text omits the parenthesis:

> [25] [Khrushov's] mispronounced German 'thank you' (*danke*) rhymed exactly with the locative case of the Russian word for 'bank' – where, by the way, he worked.
> (38)
>
> [. . .] *ego nemeckoe – 'spasibo' v tochnosti prorifmivalo s predlozhnym padezhom banka, v kotorom on, kstati skazat', sluzhil.*
> *(E* R, 26)

In "A Russian Beauty" the reader is assumed to know no French (though again the omission of the explanatory parentheses in the original presupposes a more cultured receiver):

> [26] She spoke French fluently, pronouncing *les gens* (the servants) as if rhyming with *agence* and splitting *août* (August) in two syllables (a-ou). She naively translated the Russian *grabezhi* (robberies) as *les grabuges* (quarrels) [. . .]
> (*RB,* 4; cf. RB R; *Sogl,* 237)

And it is only understandable that also the author's screenplay version of *Lolita* anticipates a less sophisticated audience ("movie-goers") than the initial novel. The revised text goes so far as to explain overtly the particular garblings of French in Charlotte's love letter to Humbert. Coming across the epistolary address ("*mon cher, cher Monsieur*") Humbert interjects, in a barely camouflaged aside to the viewer:

> [27] [. . .] that's a new one: she thinks it's a term of endearment.
> (*L* S, 73–4; cf. *L*, 67)

Such clues can be expanded to a greater length, even to a point where they begin impinging on the unfolding of the narrated action itself. Veritable language lessons may be offered for monolingual readers in the margin of the primary narrative.[25] The authorial commentary appended to Tamara's letter in *Speak, Memory* provides one case in point:

> [28] 'Why did we feel so cheerful when it rained?' she asked in one of her last letters, reverting as it were to the pure source of rhetorics. '*Bozhe moy*' (*mon Dieu* – rather than 'My God'), where has it gone, all that distant, bright, endearing (*Vsyo eto dalyokoe, svetloe, miloe* – in Russian no subject is needed here, since these are neuter adjectives that play the part of abstract nouns, on a bare stage, in a subdued light).
> (249)

Related instances from the author's fiction:

> [29] She remembered that it was time to call for Misha's wristwatch, which he had broken in Paris and had sent her by *okaziya* (i.e. 'taking the opportunity of somebody's traveling that way').
> (BN; *RB,* 40)
>
> [30] The librarian [. . .] signed himself 'Sinepuzov' (a surname, meaning 'blue belly', which affects a Russian imagination in much the same way as Winterbottom does an English one) [. . .]
> (CP; *ND,* 99)

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25. PRINCE has formerly referred to the existence of narratives that function "as if they were processing linguistic data" (1980, 232). In VN's writing the technique is often taken to its humorous extreme.

[31] However (*odnako*), it really is hot here (*i zharko zhe u vas*)! I think I shall now present myself before the most luminous orbs (*presvetlïe ochki,* jocular) of Alexandr Petrovich and then go for a dip (*okupnutsya,* also jocular) in the river [. . .]
(*P,* 123)

In *Ada,* Van Veen provides his reader – and the author provides his reader – with a full-scale glossary to one of the narrative passages, rendering not only word-meanings and grammatical cases, but even accents:[26]

[32] *'Barin, a barin'*, said Trofim, turning his blond-bearded face to his passenger.
'Da?'
'Dazhe skvoz' kózhanïy fartuk ne stal-bï ya trogat' etu frantsuzskuyu devku.'
Bárin: master. *Dázhe skvoz' kózhanïy fártuk:* even through a leathern apron. *Ne stal-bï ya trógat':* I would not think of touching. *Étu:* this (that). *Frantsúzskuyu:* French (adj., accus.). *Dévku:* wench. *Úzhas, otcháyanie:* horror, despair. *Zhálost':* pity. *Kóncheno, zagázheno, rastérzano:* finished, fouled, torn to shreds.
(300)

(ii) *Indirect Communication.* Some of the latter instances already verge on the parodic. When the techniques of linguistic code-baring themselves become an object of irony (as was the case at least in ex. [32]), the process of narrative communication is made more complicated. The author may either overtly burlesque the standard devices involved in prestructuring the text, or he may indulge in their flagrant misuse by feeding the reader misleading information. In either instance a *double level* of receivers is presupposed by the strategy: not only naive readers taking the parodic import in earnest are necessary for the *clou* to come through here, but also those who are discerning enough to join the author in his ironic game. (One may be reminded of the contrast drawn between the "unsophisticated" and the "very expert solver" by VN in ex. [5] above. The same conception is outlined in narratological terms by ECO when he describes "the critical reader" enjoying the assumed defeat of less discerning types of addressee [1979, 10]. Cf. also USPENSKY 1970, 124–7; CHATMAN 1978, 258–9; BOOTH 1983, 429.)

Such parodic maneuvres surface with particular frequency in VN's later fiction. There may be instances in which the inserted glosses are clearly redundant even from the standpoint of a minimally informed reader. Here the whole "orientation" towards IR becomes developed *ad absurdum.* This occurs typically in an episode from *Look at the Harlequins!,* where the discerning reader is invited to share the author's scorn for those critics who accuse him of a "tendency to strew [the] text with unnecessary French phrases":[27]

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26. Reader-addressed instructions on pronunciation: still another distinctively Nabokovian device. Compare:
There was the linden tree marking the spot, by the side of the road that sloped up toward the village of Gryazno (accented on the ultima).
(*SM,* 40)
[Pnin's mother was] the daughter of the once famous revolutionary Umov (rhymes with 'zoom off') [. . .]
(*P,* 22)
I wore plus fours, or as Germans call them: 'knickerbockers' (the 'k' is sounded).
(*Ds,* 64)

27. The citation is from LAWRENSON 1960, 73. Cf. also above n. 23.

[33] Once the back of her hand chanced to brush against the taut front of my trousers; she uttered a chilly '*pardon*' (Fr.) [. . .]
(110)

Somewhat similarly, when VN observes in Introduction to *Bend Sinister* that some readers are apt to "point out the fatal fatuity of [the] explications [offered in his prefatory remarks] and advise [him] to have footnotes next time (footnotes always seem comic to a certain type of mind)" (xiii) – this defines quite precisely the "type of mind" ridiculed in the author's later novels. The 1970 edition of *Ada* came complete with almost fifteen tightly-packed pages of "footnotes" ("Notes to *Ada*" [*A* 1970, 463–77]), glossing practically every French, Russian, or German locution occurring in the text. A "Glossary of Foreign Terms" is appended also to the Russian version of *Lolita* (*L* R, 300–4), and a self-parodic "Commentary" accompanies Annette's Russian epistle cited by Vadim in *Look at the Harlequins!* (cf. 150–1).

In addition, a double addressee is implied when the proffered glosses turn out to be misleading, or downright false. Any evocation of the gullible audience always presupposes also a higher level of readers who are capable of decoding the bilingual joke. This narrative pattern comes to the fore in *Bend Sinister,* when the burlesque reportage on what happened "meanwhile" (Russian '*mezhdu tem*') is replaced by a punningly misleading inquiry into the proper translation of the term:

[34] *Mezhdu tem* [among the themes? (Perhaps: among the subjects of his dreamlike state)] *Kristalsen, nevozmutimo dymia sigaroĭ* [Crystalsen calmly smoking his cigar], *sobral ves' shtat v aktovom zale* [called a meeting of the whole staff in the assembly hall] [. . .]
(202; the square brackets belong to the text)

Similarly in *Pale Fire* the Russian word "*shootka*" ('*shutka*' = 'joke') is parenthetically rendered as "little chute" (i.e. a diminutive of 'parachute' [cf. 221]). Kinbote also derives the name of the Zemblan spy "Izumrudov" ('*izumrud*' = 'emerald' [cf. above 3.2.3.]) from " 'of the Umruds', an Eskimo tribe sometimes seen paddling their umyaks (hide-lined boats) on the emerald waters of our northern shores" (255). And again in *Ada,* the well-known opening paragraph of the novel (3) shamelessly plays with the ignorance of the non-Slavic reader[28] – e.g. by rendering "Severnïya Territorii" (= 'Northern Territories') as "Severn Tories"; by translating the title of Tolstoj's *Detstvo i otrochestvo* (= *Childhood and Boyhood*) as "*Childhood and Fatherland*" ('fatherland' = '*otechestvo*'); or by transposing the masculine and feminine endings in another Tolstoj title, which results in "*Anna Arkadievitch Karenina*" (instead of "Anna Arkadievna Karenin": the point concerning her name has been reiterated by the author in a number of other contexts).[29]

In *Pnin,* finally, the sardonic mention of the "impressive Soviet documentary film" (81) shown at the Waindell Campus concretely indicates how easy it is for the naive

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28. In the Russified *Lolita* it is, by contrast, the Russian-speaking reader who is led astray with the piece of information that the initials "*Di-Pi*" (i.e. "D.P."; cf. *L,* 36 and 66: "that deep-voiced D.P.") originate from "*Dementii Prekoks*" (*L* R, 25)

29. VN is here inviting his readers to take an ironic stand towards faulty translations of Russian classics. He has often stated his claim that English translators are in error when they use feminine forms for the surnames of Russian literary heroines. According to him, this should be done only with "ballerina[s]" (*SO,* 285; *EO* 2, 6 *passim*). Cf. also the Tolstoj-lecture in *Lectures 2:* "Having decided to write 'Karenina', translators found themselves forced to call Anna's husband 'Mr. Karenina' " (137).

reader – for all of us – to be taken in:

> [35] It was supposed to contain not a jot of propaganda, to be all sheer art, merrymaking, and the euphoria of proud toil. Handsome, unkempt girls marched in an immemorial Spring Festival with banners bearing snatches of old Russian ballads such as *'Ruki proch ot Korei'* [. . .][30]
> (81)

Cultural Code

Essentially the same patterns of communication are observable with regard to other uses of the Russian "code" in VN's fiction: allusions to social customs, institutions, or diverse facets of the Slavic cultural history. Such materials may have been readily apparent to "the Russian *intelligent*" from the 1920's and 30's (Foreword to *Gl,* xii; cf. the author's own definition above), but they are all but obsolete from the standpoint of contemporary Anglo-American readers. It suffices to mention some characteristic instances.[31]

In "A Bad Day", a paragraph-long appendix on the rules of "*palochka-stukalochka*" (i.e. "knock-knock stick" [*DS,* 36; BD R; *Sogl.,* 96]), an ancient children's game, is inserted into the English text, which immediately lays bare the author's own concern with his readers' scanty knowledge. The paragraph is contained within the hero's mental monologue, nominally used for transmitting the information (cf. *DS,* 38; omitted from BD R; *Sogl,* 98). Similarly "*durachki*" is specified as "a simple card game" in Fyodor's "*Life of Chernyshevski*" (*G,* 247), but not in the Russian original (*G,* R, cf. 290). In *The Defense* "*lapta*" becomes parenthetically glossed as "Russian baseball" (19) – rather interestingly, as the initial text carries no mention of the game (cf. *Df* R, 14). The latter instance well exemplifies the author's project of outright *educating* the reader in those matters that are necessary for decoding his narratives.[32]

Analogous, peculiarly encyclopaedic glosses (in the same sense as *Evgenij Onegin* was in its time called an "encyclopaedia" of Russian life) may be attached to any other aspect of Slavic cultural life in VN's fiction. In "A Busy Man" (*DS,* 177; not in BM R; cf. *Sogl,* 171) the reader is instructed on the difference between Russian dates in the Old and New Styles; "*pascha*" is specified as "paschal cake" in *The Defense* (140; not in *Df* R, cf. 160); "Five Plus" is said to equate "A+" in the American grading system in *Pnin* (177); and in *The Gift* the abbreviation "*ch-k*" is specified as "*chelovek,* man, – not Cheka, Lenin's police" (220; cf. *G* R: "*chelovek, a ne drugoe*" [259]). Similarly, when Fyodor originally alludes in "*The Life of Chernyshevski*" to the activities of Sophia Perovski and her comrades "*pered vykhodom na kanal*" (*G* R, 254) – which should be obvious to any Russian schoolboy – in *The Gift* this is expanded into: "[. . .] before

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30. The further, polylingual ballad quotations are again added for the benefit of the non-Slavic reader: "*Bas les mains devant Corée*", "*La paz vencera a la guerra*", "*Der Friede besiegt den Krief*" (*ibid*).

31. In a good chapter on VN's "Technique of Translation" GRAYSON (1977, 168–76) has commented on the "cultural translatability" of the author's former Russian novels. Her observations are entirely pertinent to the present discussion. I would point out that the technical question also bears upon the larger phenomenon of IA-IR communication in the background of all Nabokovian fiction.

32. I shall return to this question in the last section of my survey (5.1.2.4.). "*Lapta*" figures also in *Mashen'ka* (*M* R, 41) and *Korol', dama, valet* (*KQKn* R, 183). The rules of the game have been described in more detail by VN in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* (*EO* 3, 135).

proceeding to the Canal Quay to assassinate Alexander II" (216). The allusion to the famous seascape-painter Ajvazovskij is explained only in *Glory* (17; cf. *Gl* R, 25); naive Yasha Chernyshevski's misconceptions about "Vrublyov" (a contamination of "Vrubel" and "Rublyov") is underlined in *The Gift* (44; not in *G* R, 47); and even the identity of Alexander Blok becomes parenthetically verified: "the celebrated poet" (*G*, 38; not in *G* R, 40).

This basic direction is reversed, as it were, in the Russian version of *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert is still assumed to be aware of facing only an American audience. It is behind his back that the author imports information to the new Russian public. So e.g. the initial "When angry Lo with a Bronx cheer had gone [. . .]" (*L*, 47) becomes:

> [36] *Posle togo chto serditaja Lo, ispustiv tak nazyvaemoe 'Bronksovoe ura' (tolstyj zvuk toshnogo otvrashchenija), udalilas'* [. . .][33]
> (*L* R, 35–6)

The ludicrous "ART" -acronym (from "American Refridgerator Transit Company" [*L*, 155]) is explicitly glossed: "*Ne 'iskusstvo' po anglijskij* [*not 'art' in English], *a 'Amerikanskaja Refridzheratorskaja Tranzitnaja firma'* " (*L* R, 140). The anti-Semitic intimations in the brochure describing the Enchanted Hunters hotel are made more overt: "*CERKVI na udobnom rasstojanii dlja verujushchikh* [*Churches are located at a convenient distance for Christians]" (*L*, R, 241; cf. *L*, 255). And when Humbert at one point compares Lolita's dance-steps to those of "a football cheer-leader" (*L*, 225), this is amplified into a full-length encyclopaedic entry:

> [37] [. . .] *golonog*[*ie*] *divchin*[*y*] *v koroten'kikh jubkakh, kotorye organizovannymi vopljami i gimnasticheskim besnovaniem pooshchrajut studentov, igrajushchikh v amerikanskoe regbi* [. . .]
> [*bare-thighed girleens in short dresses and thick sweaters who cheer on students playing American football with their organized screams and gymnastic romps]
> (211)

Subtext-Baring Devices

The proliferation of literary allusions in VN's writing – in itself a much-treated topic in criticism – constitutes another feature having bearing on the question of IR in Nabokovian narration. In an excellent survey of the author's Russian subtexts KARLINSKY has referred to the time-honored device of "making an oblique and not fully stated literary allusion" and in this way "paying [one's] audience the compliment of assuming that they did not require a more explicit identification" (1971, 2). This is clearly a central strategy in VN's fiction, and also one that poses particular problems when the texts are addressed to an eminently non-Slavic audience. (We recall the comment on "the participation of so many Russian muses" in the revised edition of *The Gift* [Foreword, 8].)

Scorn was expressed more than once in the author's texts for those readers whose knowledge of Russian literature amounts to having skimmed through "Tolstoevski"

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33. I.e. *"a dull sound of disgusted revulsion". Compare a corresponding explication from an originally Russian narrative: "Nikolay uttered a Russian grunt (*kryak*) and sat down" (Db; *DS*, 114; cf. Db R; *VCh*, 41).

(Foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading,* 6).[34] It is the anticipation of such a level of knowledge that calls forth two methods in VN's revisions of his former writing: (i) the Russian subtext may be either explicated through additional clues in the narrative; or (ii) it may be changed altogether to accommodate the cultural background of the new audience. We may regard the frequency of such cases in the author's revised novels as a direct consequence of his career-long occupation with the responses of the reader – as well as the "future reader" – evoked in his writing.[35]

(i) *Clues to Subtext.* A brief excerp from *The Gift,* dealing with the journalist Vasiliev's work on his English articles, illustrates the most direct method of subtext-baring in VN's fiction (the final parenthesis is omitted from *G* R, cf. 194):

> [38] Having a smattering of the language, [Vasiliev] wrote his article in the rough, with gaps and Russian phrases interspersed, and demanded from Fyodor a literal translation of the usual phrases found in leaders: you're only young once, wonders never cease, this is a lion and not a dog (Krylov) [. . .][36]
> (166)

Another typical example is seen in *The Defense* when Luzhin Sr. challenges his son to the ill-fated chess game:

> [39] 'Oh! Fine!', said his father, and added (quoting Pushkin's doomed duelist): 'Let's start if you are willing'.
> (49)

The Russian original takes for granted the reader's ability to identify the allusion (cf. " '*A! Velikolepno, – skazal otec. – Nachnem, pozhaluj . . .*' " [*Df* R, 50]), whereas the revised passage directs its reader not only towards the Pushkinian source, but also towards VN's own English rendering of it, published almost concurrently with the definitive version of *The Defense* itself. In *Eugene Onegin* Lenski's last words duplicate precisely ex. [39] (cf. Six: XXVII: 1.9 [*EO* 1, 239]).

In *Glory,* the "English poem" printed in a Cambridge review – "I walk along the road alone" (163) – becomes glossed as "a shameless paraphrase of Lermontov's greatest lyrical poem" (*ibid;* in *Gl* R [187] the inference is left to the reader).[37] L.I. Shigaev's error in citing "all these are deeds of bygone days" (MLISh; *TD,* 166) as an example of

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34. In *Pnin* one of Pnin's students is said to have enlisted on the course of Elementary Russian under the impression that "by the time one had mastered the Russian alphabet one could practically read 'Anna Karamazov' in the original" (10).

35. In an examination of the Englished *Invitation to a Beheading* HUGHES has drawn pertinent attention to the same question: "Nabokov's [. . .] English novels display a certain sympathy toward the reader's probable ignorance of Russian poetry" (1970, 288). Also the studies by PROFFER (1968b; 1970) and GRAYSON (1977) of VN's translated novels include comments on instances where the allusions to Russian literature are made more obvious through revision.

36. One of the author's most allusive novels, *The Gift* systematically bares its subtexts in a similar fashion. For characteristic instances cf. the inbuilt commentaries on Belyj (152; *G* R, 176), Blok (170; *G* R, 199), Lermontov (185; *G* R, 216), Nekrasov (199; *G* R, 234), or Pushkin (40; *G* R, 42; *G,* 130; *G* R 150; *G,* 135; *G* R, 155).

37. Cf. Lermontov, "*Vykhozhu odin ja na dorogu*" (1841). On the other hand, evidently in anticipation of the Russian reader's ignorance of English poetry, the Russian original specifies "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" as "*epigraf iz Kitsa*" (*Gl* R, 77), whereas in *Glory* (64) only the line from Keats's *Endymion* is cited.

Lermontov's "modernity" is pointed out only in the English version ("Incidentally, he did not realize that he was quoting from Pushkin's *Ruslan and Ljudmila*" [*ibid*]; cf. MLISh R; *VF,* 95).[38] The source of Grafitski's reflections in "A Busy Man" on his impending death becomes bared through his own mental soliloquy: "I'm roaming, say, through noisy streets – aha, that's Pushkin trying to imagine his way of death" (*DS,* 167; cf. BM R; *Sogl,* 160) – and the same happens when he attempts to visualize his future obituary: "all around that obituary, to paraphrase Pushkin again, . . . *indifferent nature would be shining*" (BM; *DS,* 170; BM R; *Sogl,* 163).[39]

The pattern of narrative communication involved in such cases is made more complicated when the reader-addressed clues are placed *inside* various levels of embedding. Typically, when Ilya Borisovich in "Lips to Lips" reads in a letter from his Russian publisher that his new novel "moves the reader with a face's singular expression, to paraphrase Baratynski, the singer of the Finnish crags" (*RB,* 55), this foregrounds also the concerns of the author behind the text, always eager to instruct his readers on the niceties of Russian literature.[40] In "A Letter That Never Reached Russia", the description of the protagonist's evenings spent in émigré dance halls discloses a similar pattern: "And so I enjoy watching [. . .] how 'pair after pair flick by', to quote Pushkin [. . .]" (86).[41] And also in the case of the embedded letter in "The Admiralty Spire", N-agent's overt sarcasm at the banal title of his competitor's novel ("*Admiral'tejskaja igla*") receives its motivation from the needs of IR rather than the fictive addressee:

> [40] Neat title – if for no other reason than that it is, isn't it, an iambic tetrameter, [. . .] and a famous Pushkinian line to boot.[42]
> (125–6)

(ii) *Change of Subtext.* A very characteristic transposition occurs in *Despair* when Hermann Karlovich makes use of the plot in *Othello* to illustrate his powers of invention: "[. . .] I made the Moor skeptical and Desdemona unfaithful" (56). In the Russian text

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38. "*Dela davno minuvshikh dnej*" is the opening line of *Ruslan i Ljudmila* (1820).

39. In the Russian story Grafitskij merely quotes the first and penultimate lines of "*Brozhu li ja vdol' ulic shumnykh*" (1929). The same subtext is used in Sineusov's reflections anent his wife's death in "*Ultima Thule*". The literary source is again somewhat incongruously bared in the monologist's own discourse: " 'Indifferent nature', says Pushkin. Nonsense! " (UT; *RB,* 151; cf. UT R; *VF,* 275: " *'Ravnodushnaja priroda' – kakoj vzdor!* "). Compare also *Pnin,* where it is Pnin who toys in his mind with these lines (67–8, 73).

40. The original reads more cryptically: "*Vash roman volnuet svoim lica ne obshchim vyrazheniem*" (Lips R; *VF,* 261). Cf. ll. 7–9 of "*Muza*" by Baratynskij:
Ni sklonnosti v nej, ni dara net;
No porazhen byvaet mel'kom svet
Ejo lica neobshchim vyrazheniem.
(BARATYNSKIJ 1829, 168)
Galatov is of course poking fun at his naive addressee ("*ni dara net*" = *there is no talent'), whereas the author is prodding *his* readers to decipher for themselves the hidden irony.

41. Cf. LR R: "*Ja ljublju gljadet', kak 'cheta mel'kaet za chetoj'* " (*VCh,* 47) – the quotation is from *Evgenij Onegin* (Five: XLI: l. 4). VN renders the lines in a slightly different form in his translation: "Monotonous and mad/like young life's whirl,/the waltz's noisy whirl revolves,/ pair after pair flicks by" (*EO* 1, 222).

42. I.e. l. 54 of Prologue to *The Bronze Horseman* (1833). In the original text it is merely noted that the title is "*znamenityj* [famous]" (ASp; *VF,* 218).

it was Pushkin's short story "*Vystrel*" ("The Shot" [1830]) that was used for the same purpose ("[. . .] *v moej peredache* [. . .] *Sil'vio napoval bez lishnikh slov ubival ljubitelja chereshen i s nim – fabulu* [*in my version Sil'vio killed the cherry-lover right off – and with him the original plot as well]" [45]).[43] In a similar manner, N-agent's contemptuous reference to "[. . .] *nekto Prishvin* (*ne rodstvennik pisatelja*)" in the original "A Slice of Life" (SL R; *Sogl,* 225) is revised into "a person called Plekhanov (totally unrelated to the socialist philosopher)" (SL R; *DS,* 141) – presumably in anticipation of the philosopher's being more familiar to the American reader than the little-translated Soviet prosaist.

In the Russified *Lolita* the direction becomes once more reversed, as the original subtexts are on occasion altered with regard to the Slavic audience. The effect is a curious one, for in most instances Humbert Humbert reveals no particular knowledge of the Russian literary tradition. While Humbert, for instance, initially exemplifies his discourse on the stability of literary types with an allusion to *King Lear* (*L,* 258), his counterpart in the Russian text again evokes Pushkin: "*Nikogda ne uedet s Oneginym v Italiju knjaginja N.* [*Never will Princess N. travel with Onegin to Italy]" (*L,* R, 247) – the reference is to Tat'jana's show of marital fidelity in Chapter Eight of *Evgenij Onegin* (cf. *EO* 3, 240–1). The parody of *Macbeth* in Quilty's plea at Pavor Manor (*L,* 293) is replaced by another Pushkin-allusion: "[. . .] *budu zhit' dolgami, kak zhil ego otec po slovam poeta* [*I shall live by means of debts as his father did, according to the poet]" (*L* R, 280; *Evgenij Onegin,* One: III: 1. 2 [*EO* 1, 96]). Even Quilty's taunting guestbook entry in the original paper-chase section – "A. Person, Porlock, England" (*L,* 244) – is given a definitely Slavic guise (Eisenstein, obviously): "*P.O. Tjomkin, Odessa, Texas*" (*L* R, 231).[44]

5.1.2.4. The "Family Circle"

It remains to comment on a quite distinctive mode of narrative prestructuring, bringing to the fore our previously-formulated notion of the Nabokovian *persona.* Polylingual puns, cultural and literary allusions, or other esoteric references may be explicated

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43. We notice that either of the two subtexts fits equally well into the network of "adultery"-references implanted into Hermann's narration (cf. below 6.1.3.). Moreover, the substitution coincides with the authorial poetics also outside the novel, for Pushkin and Shakespeare were the two writers most consistently coupled by VN in his critical pronouncements. E.g. in *Nikolai Gogol* he calls Pushkin "the greatest poet of [. . .] all time, excepting Shakespeare" (29). Compare also *EO* 3, 192.

44. In addition, the Russian *Lolita* systematically makes explicit the non-Slavic subtexts kept covert in the original. CUMMINS refers to this when he notes that "the new *Lolita* has exegesis right in the body of the text" (1977, 354). On the manipulation of subtexts in *L* R cf. also GRAYSON 1977, 171–2. E.g. the allusions to Poe's "Annabel Lee" (cf. *L* R, 1, 9 *passim*), Eliot's "Gerontion" (7, 238), Goethe's "*Erlkönig*" (221), Browning's "Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister" (225), Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (236), Verlaine's "*Nevermore*" (241), and Mérimée's ("*Merri Mej*") *Carmen* (258) are explicated. The same method is used by VN in the Russian rendering of his memoir. With regard to an excerpt in the Mademoiselle-section he comments: "*Interesno, kto zametit, chto etot paragraph postroen na intonacijakh Flobera* [*It will be interesting to see who notices that this paragraph is based on Flaubertian intonations]" (*SM* R, 103; the entire paragraph is missing from *SM,* cf. 112).

not only within the local framework of a given text, but also through intertextual connections with *other works* by the author. Such instances imply a rather particular category of potential receivers – readers who are not necessarily familiar with the extrinsic codes appropriated by the author in his narratives, but who are still willing to *learn* the more idiosyncratic "code" underlying the comprehensive opus.[45] It is this category, the category of Nabokov-devotees we might say, that is best described with the author's own phrase from *Nikolai Gogol:* "a closed family-circle" (cf. the above quotation in ex. [3]).

The intertextual method is put into use in *Bend Sinister,* where many of the unexplained foreign phrases spoken at Padukgrad turn out to be plain Russian, covertly interlinking with occurrences of those same locutions elsewhere in VN's writing. Such is the case e.g. with the bilingual reportage on Krug's blackout in the hands of his Ekwilist captors (for related play in this excerpt see also above ex. [34]):

> [41] *Tut pocherk zhizni stanovitsja kraĭne nerazborchivym* [here the long hand of life becomes extremely illegible]. *Ochevidtzy, sredi kotorykh byl i ego vnutrennit̆ sogliadataĭ* [witnesses among whom was his own something or other ('inner spy'? 'private detective'? The sense is not at all clear)] [. . .] afterwards said [. . .] that he had to be tied [. . .]
> (202; all square brackets are in the text)

The sense remains "unclear" to the hero as well as to the large majority of readers perusing *Bend Sinister* at the time of its first American publication (in 1947). "*Sogljadataj*" was the title of VN's fourth Russian novel, extant at the time only in obscure printings brought out a decade earlier in Paris. One notices that the "family circle" addressed in the 1947 edition of *Bend Sinister* was indeed a limited one. Later prefacing the 1965 English reprinting of *The Eye* the author casually commented:

> [42] The Russian title of this little novel is *Soglyadatay* (in traditional transliteration), pronounced phonetically 'Sugly-dart-eye', with the accent on the penultimate. It is an ancient military term meaning 'spy' or 'watcher', neither of which extends as flexibly as the Russian word.
> (Foreword, 7)

Similarly the motivation hidden inside the name of one Ekwilist official – "Konkordiĭ Filadelfovich Kolokololiteĭshchikov" (*BS,* 188) – may be decoded even by non-Russian readers if we remember the absurd spelling exercise cited by VN in his memoir: "*kolokololiteyshchiki perekolotili vïkarabkavshihsya vïhuholey,* 'the church-bell casters slaughtered the desmans that had scrambled out' " (*SM,* 170). The linkage is again dependent on our reading the the entire opus as a single whole. *Bend Sinister,* for its part, may be used as a source for decoding an excerpt in *Ada,* where an untranslated pun is based on the Russian noun *raduga:* "the rain [. . .] continued on its presumable way to Raduga or Ladoga or Kaluga or Luga, shedding an uncompleted rainbow [. . .]" (68). The term has figured earlier as one of Krug's pet-names for his son David: "Come, *raduga moia* [my rainbow], give me your hand" (*BS,* 143; square brackets in the text).[46]

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45. ECO has referred, rather aptly with regard to the present problem, to a text that "*creates* the competence of its Model Reader" (1979, 7; his emphasis). In VN's case the "text" in question is represented by the entire authorial canon.

46. Compare also VN's comment on "Rainbows/*radugi*" in his note to One: XXVII: l. 9 of *Evgenij Onegin* (*EO* 2, 110).

Entire networks of undecoded litarary allusions in the author's fiction are illuminated through uses of the same subtexts elsewhere in the opus. Humbert Humbert's wistful recollection of his life after Lolita's departure contains a mention of attempts to "fall back in old settings in order to save what still could be saved in the way of *souvenir, souvenir que me veux-tu*? Autumn was ringing in the air [. . .]" (*L*, 257). The subtext is overtly bared in the English version of "The Admiralty Spire" through a reference to "helpless echoes of Verlaine: *Souvenir, Souvenir, que me veux-tu*? *L'automne . . .*" (*TD*, 132–3).[47] Fyodor's explicit reference to "the braked line from *King Lear* consisting entirely of five 'nevers' (*G*, 297) comments on covert occurrences of the same source in other novelistic contexts: in *Despair* where Hermann uses it to punctuate his discourse on immortality ("never, never, never, never, never will your soul in that other world be quite sure [. . .]" (112); in *Look at the Harlequins!* (cf. 23); or in Ada's deft bilingual parody:

[43] *Ce beau jardin fleurit en mai,*
Mais en hiver
Jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais, jamais
N'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert, n'est vert,
n'est vert.
(*A*, 92)

In certain instances an impression is created that even more limited groups of IR are evoked by the author through his textual strategies. The printing of the three-volume *Lectures* after VN's own death made public still an additional category of Nabokovian readers: those familiar with the contents of the author's lectures, or perhaps even those having factually attended the original courses. This impression is particularly strong when one reads *Lolita*, where materials discussed by VN in his lectures are being repeatedly used for allusive games in the novel. Humbert Humbert's odd-looking confession: "*J'ai toujours admiré l'oeuvre ormonde du sublime Dublinois*" (*L*, 202) should be obvious to anyone acquainted with the author's lecture on *Ulysses*, for quite noticeable attention is here given to episodes taking place in the "Ormond" Hotel (*Lectures 1*, 337–42). The source of one line in Humbert's Lolita-poem ("I cannot get out, said the starling" [*L*, 249]) becomes bared in the margin of VN's Jane Austen -lecture, where the line is glossed as "a famous passage in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768)" (*Lectures 1*, 26). Also Humbert's sardonic address to those "French scholars" (*L*, 198) who may have noticed the literary antecedent of Lolita's music teacher – "Miss Emperor" (*ibid*) – is given a humorous motivation when we look at the author's lecture on *Madame Bovary*. The identity of Emma's music teacher is discussed here (for the chapter on *Madame Bovary* cf. *Lectures 1*, 125–77), and one of VN's exam questions on Flaubert actually reads:

[44] Who was Felicie Lempereur?
(*ibid*, 384)

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47. The quotation is from the opening of Verlaine's "*Nevermore*". In the Russian *Lolita* Humbert's mention of "autumn" is specified as "*Verlenovskaja osen'* " (*L* R, 241), whereas the Russian original of "The Admiralty Spire" again anticipates a more knowledgeable audience by keeping the subtext covert (cf. ASp R; *VF*, 225). We might perhaps infer something from these examples regarding VN's expectations anent the cultural level of past and present-day Russian readers.

5.2. *Manifestations of Ne: Overt Address and Shifting of Addressee*

5.2.1. A Survey of Ne-Markers

When the receiver of the narrative is addressed *overtly,* by aid of certain linguistic formulae, it is the communicative relationship between N and his fictive Ne-agents that becomes foregrounded in the text. JAKOBSON has noted that "orientation towards the addressee [. . .] finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative" (1960, 355). Above, we already saw some examples of those forms that N-agent's overtly polemical relationship with his addressee may occasion (exs. [12]–[20]). What will be undertaken here, is a more systematic survey of such signals as they keep occurring in various functions throughout VN's narrative fiction. (On "signals of the narratee" cf. esp. the three papers by PRINCE [1971a, b, 1973, 11–17] whose listings encompass also some of the covert cases discussed above. For other approaches cf. GENETTE 1972, 259–62; CHATMAN 1978, 253–62; NØJGAARD 1979, 60–2; ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1980, 36–7; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 103–5.)

In themselves, these markers may often be obvious enough, but in VN's writing they are still used for a rich variety of effects. In the following I shall tabulate: (i) the mainly grammatical devices used for evoking Ne in the author's fiction; (ii) their distribution in particular texts; (iii) devices used for further individuating Ne as a specific protagonist in the narrative. I shall try to keep an eye on the more distinctive uses of Ne in Nabokovian narration.

Second-Person Forms

In the most direct cases of narrative communication, any mention of *you* uttered on N-agent's level – in contradiction to second-person forms occurring in discourse uttered by C-agents – functions as an evocation of Ne.[48] Using second-person pronominal forms, N may concretize a whole spectrum of attitudes towards his addressee, observable e.g. in Hermann Karlovich's oscillations between cringing servility ("This happened, as I have had the honor of informing you [. . .]" [*Ds,* 58]), impatience ("You must be fools not to understand" [. . .]" [203]), or outright open hostility: "You rogues" (26); "You swine, you" (31). The same communicative pattern may on occasion be manifested also through uses of the first person (cf. PRINCE: "even an 'I' can designate a 'you' " [1973, 25n.]). This is what happens in *Lolita,* where Humbert strives to establish a veritable sense of *accompliceship* between himself and his future audience:

> [45] Let us go on with this curious tale.
> (47)
>
> [46] Let us be prim and civilized [. . .]
> (21)
>
> [47] Let's even smile a little. After all, there is no harm in smiling.
> (128)

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48. Because we are dealing with Nabokovian narration, allowance must always be made for anomalous practices. There are rare occasions in which N may address his words directly to the hero, as in *Invitation to a Beheading:* "Cincinnatus, your criminal exercise has refreshed you" (33). Or the hero may be made to address N, as in *Bend Sinister,* where Krug – after having learned of his own fictionality – directs his last words to his creator: "You, you –" (216).

In *Despair,* again, the device is laid entirely bare as Hermann indulges in one of his self-parodic asides:

> [48] My life is all mangled and messed, but here I am clowning away, juggling with bright little descriptions, playing on the cosy pronoun 'we' [. . .]. But be patient with me, my reader. The walk we shall presently take will be your rich reward. These conversations with readers are quite silly too. Stage asides. The eloquent hiss: 'Soft now! Someone is coming . . .'
> (64)

Similarly, given verb forms (mentioned in the above quote from Jakobson) function as standard markers of Ne. Uses of *the imperative* are exemplified in *Pale Fire* by Kinbote's injunctions to the readers of his Commentary: "See, frequently see, note to line 181" (169); "See Foreword, see Foreword, at once" (260). Also Shade exhorts his reader: "Give me now/Your full attention" (ll. 697–8; 59). And an identical command occurs in "Fame", where the speaker's doubts regarding his audience's attention are still more openly voiced: "Reread it/and pause for a moment to ponder these lines" (ll. 47–8; *PP,* 105). In some of VN's other texts even parodic applications of the obsolete "*vocative*" may be discerned – e.g. in Humbert's narration: "O Reader, My Reader!" (*L,* 199). Or in *Pnin:* "[. . .] this was Tuesday, O Careless Reader!" (75).

Such pronounced efforts to make contact with Ne are perhaps given their most concrete form through uses of *interrogative* constructions (PRINCE 1980, 230). A telling example occurs in the first part of *Ada,* as Van Veen inserts into his text a whole appendix of burlesque exam-questions on the narrative. Describing his handwalking feat during Ada's 1884 birthday picnic, Van suddenly interrupts the reportage with the following:

> [49] Questions for study and discussion:
> 1. Did *both* palms leave the ground when Van, while reversed, seemed actually to 'skip' on his hands?
> 2. Was Van's adult incapacity to 'shrug' things off only physical or did it 'correspond' to some archetypal character of his 'undersoul'?
> 3. Why did Ada burst into tears at the height of Van's performance?[49]
> (82–3; emphasis in the text)

One should notice that such ibuilt queries always find their answer in the actual design of Nabokovian narration. Consider e.g. this interpolation appended to an episode from Van's and Ada's stay at Mont Roux in 1905:

> [50] 'Wipe your neck!' he called after her in a rapid whisper (who, and where in this tale, in this life, had also attempted a *whispered cry*?).
> (520; emphasis in the text)

The answer is given some fifty pages (four years) earlier, inserted within the scene between Van and Lucette just before the latter's suicide. The italics function as an

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49. This section surely has as its immediate model the queries posed by VN himself for his students at the end of his lecture series (cf. *Lectures I,* 383–5; *SO,* 314). Still, on a more general plane, such manipulations are not unprecedented in narrative literature. As VN in fact points out in his Joyce lecture, already the hundred-page "Ithaca" -section in *Ulysses* consisted solely of questions and answers on the narrative. More recently, two years before the publication of *Ada,* Donald Barthelme had played with the same device in his novel *Snow White* (cf. BARTHELME 1967, 82–3).

additional Ne-directed clue:

> [51] 'I apollo, I love you', she whispered frantically, trying to *cry* after him in *whisper* because the corridor was all doors and ears.
> (467; emphases as above)

Still another occurrence of the question-and-answer method from Van Veen's chronicle:

> [52] [Q:] All this was mere scenery, easily packed, labeled 'Hell' and freighted away; and only very infrequently some reminder would come – say, in the trickwork closeup of two left hands belonging to different sexes – doing what? Marina could no longer recall (though only *four* years had elapsed!) – playing *à quatre mains?* – no, neither took piano lessons – casting bunny-shadows on a wall? – closer, warmer but still wrong; measuring something? But what? Climbing a tree? The polished trunk of a tree? But where, when?
> (253; emphasis in the text)
>
> [A:] 'Why do stairs creak so desperately, when two children go upstairs', she thought, looking up at the balustrade along which two left hands progressed with strikingly similar flips and glides like siblings taking their first dancing lessons.
> (39–40)

A closer look at the correlating episodes in *Ada* would reveal a series of similar tests on Ne-agent's decoding capacity.[50] The narrative in the novel is overtly designed to *instruct* its Ne in the skills demanded by all Nabokovian writing. In this, *Ada* can to my mind be seen as a rather extreme instance of the text type described in narrative theory as "a text reading itself" (PRINCE 1980, 230). By making explicit the demands it places on the reader – by "commenting [. . .] directly on [its] constituent parts taken as units in [. . .] the [narrative] codes" (*ibid*) – the novel also points towards the strategies that are required for solving its inbuilt puzzles. The interrogative is one of the essential forms through which Van Veen concretizes his pedagogic program.[51]

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50. Compare:
> [Q:] The youngest of the three sisters, a beautiful chestnut-curled little maiden with lewd eyes and bobbing breasts (where had he seen her before? – recently, but where?)
> (299)
> [A:] [. . .] a slender youth clad in black leather from neck to ankle, chestnut curls escaping from under a vizored cap.
> (283)
> [Q:] Van [. . .] stooped to pick up a curved tortoiseshell comb [. . .]; he had seen one, exactly like that, quite recently, but when, in whose hairdo?
> (53)
> [A:] [. . .] a tortoiseshell comb in [Blanche's] chestnut hair caught the amber light.
> (48)
> [Q:] An elbow chair with a high back and a bedside stool supporting a brass candlestick with a greasepan and handle (whose double he had seemed to have seen mirrored a moment ago – where?) completed the worst and main part of the humble equipment.
> (42)
> [A:] A pair of candlesticks, mere phantoms of metal and tallow, stood, or seemed to stand, on the broad window ledge.
> (41)

51. The cultivation of such a narrative method hardly justifies the claim put forward by CHRISTENSEN that "the narrator [in *Ada*] could not care less whether his message reaches [Ne] or not" (1981, 153). Van Veen could not care more.

The frequency of second-person forms is readily accountable in certain conventional modes of discourse, which are by definition aimed at a specific addressee. Such is the case e.g. with the epistolary mode, applied by VN in short stories like "A Letter That Never Reached Russia", "The Admiralty Spire", " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' ", or "*Ultima Thule*".[52] Lyrical poems provide another standard breeding-ground for discourse couched in the second person.[53] In VN's verse this mode is represented e.g. by the speaker's addresses to his beloved ("How I Love You" [*PP,* 79–81], plus dozens of untranslated Russian poems); his father ("*Paskha*" [*Stikhi* 1979, 66], "Evening on a Vacant Lot" [*PP,* 69–73]); his mother ("*Ljudjam ty skazhesh': nastalo*" [*Stikhi* 1979, 29]); or other relatives and acquaintances ("*Ju.R.*" [*GP,* 52]).[54] In a more rhetorical vein, the Nabokovian speaker may address his discourse to practically anyone: fellow poets ("*I.A. Buninu*" [*Stikhi* 1979, 38], "*Pamjati Gumileva*" [*ibid,* 95], "On Translating 'Eugene Onegin' " [*PP,* 175]); the muse ("The Muse" [*PP,* 57] and at least five other poems); Russia ("To Russia" [*PP,* 97–9]);[55] chance passers-by ("*Prokhozhij s elkoj*" [*Stikhi* 1979, 178]); an unknown woman in a picture ("*L'Inconnue de la Seine*" [*PP,* 83–5]); or even a "model" observed "in magazine ads through all seasons" ("Ode to a Model" [*PP,* 173]).

It is predominantly when such addresses begin to spill over, as it were, from markedly lyrical or epistolary contexts into other types of discourse that they become interesting

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52. At least in the latter story an overtly parodic stance is adopted towards the whole epistolary tradition. Addressing his deceased spouse, Sineusov finds himself compelled to invent "some totally new handbook of epistolary samples [. . .] To a deceased: Respecterfully yours" (*RB,* 149).

53. On this question cf. the following remark by WIMSATT: "There are [. . .] poems (poems of a lover to his mistress, for instance, or poems addressed to Death or to the wild West Wind) in which a particular dramatic listener has a great deal to do with determining a certain kind of style, a certain kind of structure, a certain kind of metaphor. [. . .] The actual reader of a poem is something like a reader over another reader's shoulder; he reads through the dramatic reader, the person to whom the full tone of the poem is addressed in the fictional situation" (1954, xv). To my knowledge, here was one of the first instances in Anglo-American literary criticism that a clear-cut differentiation was drawn between the separate *levels* of audience in literary communication.

54. It may be conjectured that the initials in the latter poem stand for VN's "Cousin Yuri" (i.e. "Jurij Evgenevich Rausch von Traubenberg"), described in some detail in Chapter Ten of *Speak, Memory* (196–200). We learn from the last stanza of "*Ju.R.*" that the addressee is already dead when the speaker utters the discourse (*GP,* 52; cf. also *SM,* 200). This is a relatively common situation in VN's narrative fiction, and we shall yet return to it in the following. One may also recall here the concluding lines of "Evening on a Vacant Lot":

> [. . .] in the twilight toward me a man
> comes, calls, I recognize
> your energetic stride. You haven't
> changed much since you died.
> (*PP,* 73)

55. Another frequent addressee in the author's verse, Russia is evoked also in "*Rossija*" (*Stikhi* 1979, 13), "*Les*" (*GP,* 134–5), "*Rus'* " (*ibid,* 173–4), "*Rodine*" (*Stikhi* 1979, 96), "*K rodine*" (*ibid,* 153), and "*K Rossii*" ([1928] *ibid,* 214). The latter text is identically titled with the 1939 Russian original of "To Russia".

from our present standpoint. We may speak here of a distinctly *lyrical mode* in Nabokovian narration, since in many of the author's novels the standard device of an apostrophe is applied in an entirely unconventional manner.

(i) One method is to multiply the second-person references in the text to an extent that an impression of a new narrative category – that of "second-person narration" – is created (for this notion cf. CHATMAN 1978, 264; STANZEL 1982, 225). An often-cited example is provided by Michel Butor's *La Modification,* whereas in VN's fiction the device would appear to be used largely for parodistic purposes.[56] This is the case at least in *Transparent Things,* where already the choice of the hero's name ("Hugh" Person) effects a transformation of the narrative into a sustained address to a fictive "you". The parody – possibly even of the specific Butorian model[57] – is laid bare e.g. in Hugh's telephone conversation with his future wife:

> [53] 'You Person?' asked her voice.
> [. . .]
> 'Yes, it's me, I mean 'you', I mean you mispronounce it most enchantingly.'
> (42–3)

And even more flagrantly in the paragraph devoted to the subsequent meeting between the two:

> [54] You were served a cup of hot milk. You also got, separately, a little sugar and a dainty-looking envelope of sorts. You ripped open the upper margin of the envelope. You added the beige dust it contained to the ruthlessly homogenized milk in your cup. You took a sip – and hurried to add sugar. But no sugar could improve the insipid, sad, dishonest taste.
> (46–7)

(ii) Another major extension of the mode occurs in *Speak, Memory,* although here it is only through a very gradual accumulation of the second-person references that the identity of the addressee becomes disclosed. The first of such overt addresses to an unnamed "you" is found in Chapter Six, as VN mentions a Swiss mountain trail "where [. . .] you and I had been delighting in swarms of [butterflies]" (129). After this, related insertions begin appearing with a growing frequency: "[Chapter Ten] [. . .] the view from a ranch you and I rented that year" (195); "[Chapter Thirteen] [. . .] rue Boileau where I lodged in two shabby rooms with you and our child" (258); "[Chapter Fourteen] [. . .] in the spring of 1929, you and I went butterfly hunting in the Pyrenees" (281; cf. also 292) – until in the concluding Chapter Fifteen the discourse assumes the form of being narrated in its entirety "in the second person". The chapter opens with an evocation of the author's wife ("The years are passing, my dear, and presently nobody will know what you and I know" [295]) and it ends with a long paragraph describing how

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56. A more recent application is seen in Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller,* with its deceptively innocuous opening: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*" (CALVINO 1979, 3). The rest of Calvino's narrative will concern the fictive reader's attempts to finish his reading. Such a paradoxical strategy is to my mind much closer to the Nabokovian usage than Butor's outmoded experimentation. I am indebted for this point to ANTTILA 1983.

57. As has been suggested by COUTURIER 1978, 173. For other remarks on the "Hugh"/"you" -pun cf. the review of *Transparent Things* by ALTER 1972, 73.

"you and I, and our child" (309) walked towards the vessel that was to take the Nabokov family to their new homeland (cf. 297–9, 301–7 for other direct evocations).

In this way it develops that the narrative in *Speak, Memory* is addressed to a very specific receiver indeed, even though her presence is for the most part kept secret. (There is only a single mention of "the time I [. . .] married" [93] in the entire memoir.) In the end, even the seemingly extraneous dedication of the text "to Véra" on the front leaf of *Speak, Memory* turns out to have a peculiarly narratological dimension, for it is made to express the author's consistently-held notion of his ideal readers. It is only in members of "a closed family-circle" (above 5.1.2.4.) that any author may hope to find for himself a fully congenial audience.[58]

This conception is once more transferred into VN's fiction in those numerous instances where his invented tellers are themselves made to construe ideal Ne-agents for their narrations. In fact, the latter device had been tried out by the author as early as 1924, twenty-seven years prior to the first publication of *Speak, Memory*. In "The Thunderstorm" the fictive N quite similarly puts off until the last paragraph the disclosure that the telling has been all along addressed to a single auditor. Concluding the tale of his nocturnal adventure, N is moved to comment:

> [55] [. . .] and laughing to myself as I ran, I imagined how, in a few moments, I would be in your house and start telling you about that night's midair accident, and the cross old prophet who fell into my yard.
> (*DS*, 123)

The lyrical method was to reoccur four decades later in *Pale Fire*, where Shade addresses his entire 999-line "Pale Fire" to his wife Sybil ("And all the time, and all the time, my love,/You too are there, beneath the word, above/the syllable [. . .]" [ll. 949–50; 68]). And still in his last novel VN revived the same notion, allowing Vadim to address *his* wife in terms that are almost identical with those used earlier in the authentic memoir (*LH!*, 86, 122, 168, 169–70, 193, 199 *passim*). The episode where Vadim envisions his wife going through the manuscript of his latest novel is characteristic in making the writer's excellence directly dependent on the excellence of his projected reader:

> [56] I was able [. . .] to rerun the actual images of those cards you read: they were projected on the screen of my fancy together with the gleam of your topaz ring and the beat of your eyelashes [. . .]. The lucidity of the image was correlated with the quality of the writing. You knew my work too well to be ruffled by a too robust erotic detail, or annoyed by a too recondite literary allusion. It was bliss reading *Ardis* with you that way, triumphing that way over the colored space separating my lane from your lounge chair. Was I an excellent writer? I was an excellent writer.
> (*LH!*, 234)

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58. Almost all of VN's novels published after *Lolita* – new texts as well as recastings of the previous ones – carry the dedication to his wife. That precisely the notion of an "ideal" reader is evoked here becomes clear when we look again at the 1974 poem "*Akh, ugonjat* [. . .]", replying to the hostile reception of VN's last novel (cf. above ex. [8]). Also this text is headed by the familiar dedication, and in it the speaker draws a quite unequivocal opposition between the decoding skills of his critics and those of his primary addressee:
> *Tol'ko ty, tol'ko ty vse divilas' vosled*
> *chernym, sinim, oranzhevym rombam . . .*
> [*Only you, only you were still amazed by/the black, blue, and orange rhomboids . . .]
> (*Stikhi* 1979, 299)

While allowing for considerable variation, the above forms still designate a largely abstract class of Ne-agents – a more or less unspecified "you" to whom N keeps addressing the discourse. On the other hand, it is well known from the history of the novel that such references may also be made more elaborate, even to a point where the individuating traits assigned to Ne are effective in elevating him into a distinct "character" in his own right. This was a technique established already in the work of such novelists as Sterne or Gogol' (e.g. PRINCE 1971a, 120–1, 1971b, 101–2, 1973, 13, 17–18; ATAROVA-LESSKIS 1980, 36–7), and the device has been revived by VN for his own thematic ends.

So Humbert Humbert may interrupt the description of his erotic encounter with Lolita, mockingly shifting the reference from the narrated history directly to occurrences taking place on the level of Ne himself. The manoeuvre is an unmistakably Sternean one:

> [57] I cannot tell my learned reader[59] (whose eyebrows, I suspect, have by now travelled all the way to the back of his bald head), I cannot tell him how the knowledge came to me. (*L*, 49)

Similarly:

> [58] I have to go into these details [. . .] because otherwise the reader (ah, if I could visualize him as a blonde-bearded scholar with rosy lips sucking *la pomme de sa canne* as he quaffs my manuscript!) might not understand [. . .] (221)
>
> [59] Our destination was, let me remind my patient reader whose meek temper Lo ought to have copied, the gay town of Lepingville, somewhat near the hypothetical hospital. (138)

In *Ada*, it is Van Veen who cuts short an erotic episode in order to rebut expectations aroused in his reader:

> [60] For the sake of the scholars who will read *this* forbidden memoir with a secret tingle (they are human) in the secret chasms of libraries (where the chatter, the lays and the fannies of rotting pornographers are piously kept) – its author must add [. . .] (220; emphasis in the text)

Through these and similar markers a paradoxical position is given to Ne in Nabokovian narration, for they point towards his role not only as a receiver, but also as an *active participant* in the shaping of N-agent's discourse. This situation becomes highlighted by Humbert when he interrupts the seduction-scene at The Enchanted Hunters with a direct plea to the reader:

> [61] Please, reader: no matter your exasperation with the tenderhearted, morbidly sensitive, infinitely circumspect hero of my book, do not skip these essential pages! Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me;[60] try to discern the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my own iniquity [. . .] (*L*, 128)

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59. Cf. also *L*, 58, 132, 168. The appellation has been humorously counterparted in one of Tristram Shandy's apostrophes in Sterne: "Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read, – or by the knowledge of the great saint Paraleipomenon – I tell you beforehand, you had better throw down the book at once [. . .]" (STERNE 1759–67, 232).

60. This, too, has been anteceded in the classical narrative. Compare *Dead Souls:* "What really happened, God only knows; the reader who likes this sort of story can make up his own ending" (GOGOL' 1842, 248).

In *Pale Fire* Kinbote attempts, in effect, to convert his readers into co-authors of the invented Zembla-narrative:

> [62] Imagine a soft, clumsy giant; imagine a historical personage whose knowledge of money is limited to the abstract billions of a national debt; imagine an exiled prince [. . .] (17)

And the innate paradox of N-Ne relationship (either agent must "imagine" the other) is underlined in a still more audacious manner by Van Veen in his account of the fête at the Ardis manor. The shrewdly-placed deictic reference (*tonight*) ties together into a peculiar union the narrating situation with the instant when the narrative will be concretely assessed by the reader – this interpretative action being already presupposed, it is in effect suggested, by the events belonging to the narrated history itself:

> [63] [. . .] the talk – as so often happened at emotional moments in the Veen-Zemski branch of that strange family, the noblest in Estotiland, the grandest on Antiterra – was speckled with Russian, an effect not too consistently reproduced in this chapter – the readers are restless tonight.[61] (380)

In what follows next, our main attention will be devoted to the uses of such individuating Ne-markers in Nabokovian narration. Various types of addressee may be evoked in the course of single narratives in the author's fiction, and often it proves material for our understanding of the comprehensive text to distinguish between the separate cases. From a theoretical perspective the focus will be rather narrow, for I shall be delimiting the discussion to the interplay between N-agent's discourse and the strictly *fictive* agents for whom the discourse is addressed. Nonetheless, I suggest that the issue is an important one in studying our chosen corpus. For precisely as we must formulate for ourselves a definite picture of the fictive speakers used in VN's novels, we must also become clear about the types of Ne-agents we are dealing with. Our discussion of Nabokovian readers will conclude with remarks on this question.

5.2.2. Ne-Shifts as a Structural Principle: The "*Lolita*-Problem"

5.2.2.1. Shifting of Addressee on Local Plane

Those instances in which variable categories of receivers are addressed in the course of the same narrative we may call here *Ne-shifts*. (As it is the more common case that Ne remains *the same* throughout the narrative, the phenomenon has been only glancingly

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61. Compare other interpenetrations of Ne-level into the bordering narrative levels:
> [. . .] nobody, not even the reader, [. . .] was at his or her best at that particular party. (*A*, 250)
>
> For a minute he stood behind her, sideways to remembrance and reader. (*ibid*, 460)
>
> Paduk, clothed from carbuncle to bunion in field gray, stood with his hands behind his back and his back to the reader. (*BS*, 127)

GENETTE (1972, cf. 234–7) has treated such anomalous instances as a particular type of narrative "metalepsis". He evokes the classical example from *Tristram Shandy:* the Sternean teller asking the reader to help Mr. Shandy climb back to his bed (*ibid*, 234).

looked into in narratological literature: for a few rather perfunctory comments cf. LANSER 1981, 182–3.)

The principle behind such shifting becomes concisely illustrated in the minuscule Chapter Three: Five of *Speak, Memory.* Here we have again to do with manipulation of the addressee's level conducted in the author's own voice. In this chapter, VN takes up the spiritual (as opposed to the materialistic) justification behind his anti-Soviet strictures. Explaining that his yearning for the prerevolution Russia is "a hypertrophied sense of lost childhood, not sorrow for lost banknotes", he intrudes into the discourse for the purpose of addressing a more restricted set of receivers. It is only after this two-paragraph section that "the general reader" is once more given permission to resume:

> [64] The following passage is not for the general reader, but for the particular idiot who, because he lost a fortune in some crash, thinks he understands me.
> (73)

An even more blatant shift is seen occurring in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* when the addressee in one of Knight's letters is changed almost in mid-sentence. Compare:

> [65] This letter was begun almost a week ago, and up to the word 'life' it had been destined [. . .] to quite a different person. Then somehow or other it turned towards you, as a shy guest in a strange house will talk at unusual length to the near relative with whom he came to the party.
> (175)

Quite similarly in *Lolita, Despair, Pale Fire,* or in other Nabokovian novels making use of overtly individuated Ne-agents, the narratorial discourse may be directed to a most diverse variety of fictive receivers. When these shifts are extended from a local level to govern the larger narrative system of the text, they also receive a specifically thematic function. Such cases need to be investigated more closely here.

5.2.2.2. The System of Ne-Shifts

Of all texts by the author, *Lolita* is undoubtedly the one containing the largest variation of addresses to fictive readers. It is also a novel where a direct link exists between the types of readers evoked by N and many of the central interpretative problems in the text. I shall approach these problems by first tabulating the separate groups of Ne for whom Humbert Humbert himself addresses his discourse. After this, I shall inquire into the relationship between Humbert's narrative strategies and the status of the discourse as a distinctly *artistic* narrative. In the end, certain conclusions will be drawn from our inquiry that also have a more general bearing on Nabokovian poetics. It is suggested that in all its uniqueness as a novel *Lolita* still represents a pattern that the author kept evolving for a considerable part of his novel-writing career.

The System

The overall system of narration in *Lolita* is based on two parallel schemes of N-Ne relationships. In the first case it is the fictive editor of the text, John Ray, Jr., who addresses his words to a largely generalized reading public ("[. . .] all of us [. . .]" [Foreword, 7]). In the second instance, Humbert Humbert keeps directing his embedded text to an array of more sharply restricted categories of readers. For the present, we shall be concerned only with the latter pattern.

(i) *The Court.* On its surface, Humbert's narrative is conceived as a straightforward legal document.[62] Arrested for drunken driving and later imprisoned for having murdered the playwright Clare Quilty, Humbert spends the last fifty-six days of his life in the "well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion" (300) of an American prison ward. He manages to finish the manuscript of his confession just before succumbing to a fatal heart attack. (For reminders of the narrative situation in the novel cf. e.g. 71, 109, 270–1, 299–300, plus Ray's Foreword.)

As it develops, then, Humbert's relationship with his audience affects even the most concrete ordering of the narrative. Addressing a hypothetical court of jurors Humbert lays out the story of what he himself considers his *real* crime: the kidnapping of his twelve-year-old stepdaughter Dolores ("Lolita") and her demotion to the role of an underage mistress for the period of almost two years. On one level of the text it is mainly to justify this series of events – to demonstrate, as he says, his "inner essential innocence" (292) – that Humbert undertakes to compose his manuscript. Consequently, the first overt address to "ladies and gentlemen of the jury" occurs as early as in the opening chapter (11), and in the course of the ensuing narrative the courtroom situation is evoked more than twenty times – e.g. through mentions of "exhibits" passed by Humbert around the room (11, 12, 21, 41); through direct overtures to the judge ("I did my best, your Honor [. . .]" [181], "You may [. . .] threaten to clear the court [. . .]" [270]); through insults aimed at the jurors ("Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!" [131]); or through excerpts in which they are endowed with curiously emblematic trappings ("Oh, winged gentlemen of the jury!" [124]).[63] At one point, Humbert appears to be humorously bringing to life the entire male faction of his imagined audience:

> [66] I have to tread carefully. I have to speak in whisper. Oh you, veteran crime reporter, you grave old usher, you once popular policeman, now in solitary confinement after gracing that school crossing for years, you wretched emeritus read to by a boy! It would never do, would it, to have you fellows fall madly in love with my Lolita![64]
> (133)

On the other hand, the occurrence of the latter types of address in Humbert's confession brings out a peculiar fact about *Lolita,* essential for our present problem.

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62. This illusion was still enhanced in the first American edition of the novel (*L* 1958), where the marking [§] was used to head each of Humbert's sixty-nine chapters.

63. The "winged gentlemen" hark back to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee", which is used as one of the pervading subtexts throughout the novel. There is a related reference on 225, and also in his opening chapter Humbert mentions "the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs" (11). Lines 9–10 of Poe's lyric refer to: "[. . .] a love that the winged seraphs of heaven/ Coveted her and me". These allusions have been amply discussed by PROFFER (1968a, 34–7) and APPEL (1970a, 330–3 *passim*) who also quote the poem in full. In addition, one might surmise that Humbert's reference connotes a more metaphoric "jury" behind the literal one. Despite his professed atheism (cf. 75, 275), Humbert does suggest at the end of his confession that he intends to use the narrative "[. . .] to save not my head, of course, but my soul" (300).

64. "Wretched emeritus" discloses another literary subtext, for Humbert derives the reference from the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion". For the allusion cf. APPEL 1970a, 378. Humbert had already written "pastiches" of Eliot in Paris (cf. 18), and one of his latest efforts is seen in the poem that he addresses to Quilty on 292.

While Humbert goes on evoking the jurors throughout his whole manuscript, these passages are soon drained of all their practical purpose. Humbert himself states that somewhere "in mid-composition" he decided against using the narrative in his forthcoming trial (300). Nonetheless, court-addressed references keep recurring also in the latter half of the text: there are seventeen mentions of the court in Part One (11–140), retelling the story of Lolita's kidnapping, while the remaining Chapter Two (143–300) includes eleven related instances.[65] The prolonged seduction scene in the Enchanted Hunters hotel incorporates seven addresses (116–38), whereas in the chapter devoted to Quilty's killing (286–97) Humbert turns to the court just once – and even then only to underscore his own guilt.[66]

This distribution is meaningful in itself, for it exemplifies the weight placed by the confessor on his respective crimes. "Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges" (300), Humbert writes in his final address. But it also indicates the small heed that he finally pays to the function of his narrative as a *serious* plea. If Humbert continues referring to his jurors, playing with their hypothetical responses, or giving them a range of fully imaginary characteristics (as in ex. [66]), this is because he has knowingly reduced the first category of his addressees into a largely rhetorical figure. In this sense, *Lolita* may be said to emerge as a parody of a legal document not only from the perspective of its author (which would be an obvious claim), but *even from the viewpoint of its fictive N.* In order to become clear about Humbert's more serious purposes as N, we must look at those other categories of Ne-agents that he construes in the course of his telling.

(ii) *The Legal Establishment.* What was said in (i) holds true also for the second group of receivers in the novel. Aside from the jurors, Humbert may direct his words to other addressees involved with his confinement: his lawyer (i.e. "Clarence" [33, 151] – "Clarence Choate Clark, Esq." is identified as Humbert's attorney in Ray's Foreword [5]); the policemen interrogating him ("This I confess under torture [. . .]" [70]; cf. also 71, 188); or "the able psychiatrist who studies [his] case" (163).[67] But clearly all such references again function as little more than stylistic devices, quite deliberately manipulated by N himself. The torture exerted by the policemen is qualified by Humbert as "imaginary" (70). "*Clare*nce" is evoked as part of a larger narrative game with the

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65. Compare: (Part One) 11, 12, 21, 41 (twice), 61, 70, (twice), 87, 102, 122 (twice), 124, 130, 131, 133, 134 (Part Two) 160, 179, 181, 188, 213, 225, 233, 244, 270–1, 296, 300.

66. Humbert discards the standard "plea for insanity" favored by defense lawyers:
> I may have lost contact with reality for a second or two – oh, nothing of the I-just-blacked-out sort that your common criminal enacts; on the contrary, I want to stress the fact that I was responsible for every shed drop of his bubbleblood.
> (296)

67. One portion of the narrative was written, Humbert, says, "in the psychopathic ward for observation" (300). He also notes that some of the narrated facts may "interest only a professional psychologue" (221). The same device is used in *Despair,* where Hermann Karlovich mocks in advance the "rat-faced, sly little expert [who] will discover in [the] cacophonic orgy [of the narrative] a sure sign of psychic abnormality" (90).

identity of the murdered playwright (i.e. "*Clare* Quilty"; cf. below ex. [68]). And in still other sections of the narrative Humbert expressly models the discourse to defeat every expectation of the psychoanalytically oriented reader: "Well, comrade, let me tell you that I *did* look for a beach [. . .]" (67; Humbert's emphasis); "He did not use a fountain pen which fact, as any psycho-analyst will tell you, meant that the patient was a repressed undinist" (244). Compare also 35–6, 54, 248, 251, 278 *passim.*

(iii) *The "Literary" Establishment.* Humbert intends his narrative to be brought out as a printed book after Lolita's death (cf. 300). Therefore it is only logical that there are addresses in the manuscript also to those readers who will one day be preparing the text for publication. "Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer" (109), exhorts Humbert in one of the shortest chapters of the novel – futilely, as it appears, for his plea has not been heeded.[68] Going still ahead in time, Humbert even envisions the day when his work will be filmed by an unknown movie director. "If you want to make a movie out of my book, have one of these faces gently melt into my own, while I look" (217), he writes at one point. He also tells that during his first year with Lolita he took in "one hundred and fifty or two hundred" (166) American movies, and some of this experience is clearly used in his further suggestions to the movie-makers: the "cut" interrupting the seduction-scene at Enchanted Hunters (127); the search for Lolita to the accompaniment of radio music (207); the showdown at Pavor Manor (291).[69]

(iv) *The Reading Public.* Finally, there is the large and amorphous category of "future readers" addressed by Humbert in his manuscript. When Humbert at one point speculates on Lolita's presumed death date, evoking at the same time "elderly readers" who will be studying the text "in the first years of 2000 A.D." (291), he comes close to defining the audience for whom his discourse is ultimately intended: readers no longer regarding the narrative merely as a practical plea for innocence (above [i]), nor as a confession or a case history ([ii]), and neither as a text to be merely processed ([iii]), but above all *as a literary work of art in its own right.*

It is this particular segment of the general reading public that Humbert keeps turning to at various points in his narrative. On occasion, he may playfully delimit his public further, choosing as his addressees e.g. "French scholars" (198; cf. also "the student" [19, 221] or "the learned reader" [49, 58, 132, 168]); "the astute reader [of detective stories]" (265); "the reader who knows the ropes [with regard to prostitution]" (25); "unbiased readers [taking a critical stand towards psychoanalysis]" (278); "crack players [of tennis]" (228); or "gentle drivers gliding through summer's black nights [on the

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68. Similarly Hermann asks the printer for "a new paragraph, please" (*Ds,* 54); describes "the inviting gesture of dots, dots, dots" (*ibid*); or speculates on the effect that his narrative will have on "the typesetter or some typist, unknown to [him]" (90). So also in *Speak, Memory:*

> [. . .] he was married to Ekaterina Pushchin, sister of Ivan Pushchin, Pushkin's schoolmate and close friend. Careful, printers: two 'chin"s and one 'kin'.
> (53)

69. Compare Van Veen: "Bird-effects here, and acquiescing branches, and what you used to call 'golden gouts' " (*A,* 583). Or Hermann: "Of old, this dodge was the darling of the Kinematograph, alias Cinematograph, alias Moving Pictures" (*Ds,* 54).

American highway system]" (116).[70] But in the end the range of the potential readerdom is kept general indeed, as when Humbert addresses "human beings" (123) or insists that "*the world* know how much [he] loved [. . .] Lolita" (271; my emphasis). His final bid to Lolita in the concluding paragraph of the novel encapsules in so many words the task that he envisions for the ideal portion of his future readers. Drawing an overt parallel between "prophetic sonnets" and his own narrative, he predicts:

> [67] Thus, neither of us will be alive when the reader opens the book. But while the blood still throbs through my writing hand, you are still as much part of blessed matter as I am, and I can still talk to you from here to Alaska. [. . .] [D]o not pity C.Q. One had to choose between him and H.H., and one wanted H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, *so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations.* [. . .] *And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita.*
> (300; my emphasis)

The *Lolita*-Problem

The observation that there are other addressees in Humbert's narrative besides the concrete court has its significance.[71] In fact, what has proved to be one of the most controversial aspects of this much-debated novel is precisely the relationship established between N and his diverse categories of Ne-agents. In other words, it has been the dominant trend in *Lolita*-scholarship to lay exclusive stress on the communicative process taking place between Humbert and his immediate audience (the court of jurors), with the result that the novel has come to be treated as a more or less burlesque "defense" for its protagonist. This reading exists in two versions – one of them naive, the other more sophisticated, but to my mind still insufficient to account for the narrative system in the text.

There is no need to dwell here on the naive argument, which takes the defense-aspect of the novel at its face value, summarily identifying Humbert's narrative voice

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70. In certain cases the process of individuation is taken to an absurd degree, as Humbert proceeds to address particular readers *who have taken part in the narrated history.* These include e.g. the Beardsley doctor Ilse Tristramson (194); Humbert's colleague Gaston Godin (199); Lolita's schoolmate Electra Gold (226); G. Edward Grammar (280); Rita (252); "Jack" (ogling Lo on 155); or Jean Farlow (104) – aside from the steady stream of apostrophes to Charlotte (88, 147) or Lolita herself (16, 104, 145, 188, 231, 261, 271, 277, 291, 300). Such instances are again purely stylistic ploys on Humbert's part. Some of the addressed protagonists are already dead when the narrative is written (Charlotte, Jean Farlow): some will be dead when it is published (Lolita, most obviously); and with some others there is little chance that they will ever lay their eyes on the book. Compare the words addressed by Humbert to his French compatriot Godin:

> [. . .] *quoiqu'il y ait bien peu de chance que vous voyiez mon livre, permettez-moi de vous dire que je vous serre la main bien cordialement* [. . .]
> (199)

We remember that deceased Ne-agents have been used as a stylistic device also elsewhere in Nabokovian writing. Cf. above notes 52 and 54. So also in *Ada:* "Percy, you were to die very soon [. . .]" (273).

71. I refer here to the distinction between "public" and "private" N-agents and their addressees in the typology by LANSER 1981, 138–9. As she asserts, "the private narrator does not [. . .] conventionally undertake the equivalent of a literary act" (139). The significant thing about Humbert's narrative status, I put it, is that from a narratological standpoint he may be said to fulfil the function of either type.

with that of "Nabokov", and condemning *Lolita* itself for an advancement of immoral conduct. (The classic formulation comes from PRESCOTT who says that *Lolita* is "disgusting" for the precise reason that its N is allowed to describe "[his] perversion with the pervert's enthusiasm" [1958, 17].) The second version of this reading, the sophisticated variety, is more interesting from our standpoint, for here it is argued that even while Humbert does attempt to justify his actions to the jury, his efforts are at the same time upended by "Nabokov" behind his back. It is the author (in our sense of IA) who invites *his* readers to adopt a sceptical stance towards Humbert's protestations of innocence, and it is the resultant irony that guarantees the litarary worth of *Lolita* as a novel. Hence also the reputation of *Lolita* as an all but ideal instance of conventionally "unreliable" narration.

The latter position was cogently put by BOOTH, who argued in his famous theoretical work that –

> [the] most skilful and mature readers [of *Lolita*] [. . .] will have repudiated Humbert's blandishments from the beginning; the clues are numerous, the style is a dead giveaway throughout [. . .]. One of the major delights of this delightful, profound book is that of watching Humbert *almost* make a case for himself.
> (1961, 391; emphasis in the text)

Many subsequent theorists have followed suit, and nowadays the novel is cited almost as a matter of course in narratological discussions of the unreliable mode.[72] In less accurate terms, if often the more eloquently, this view has also been voiced in actual *Lolita*-criticism (already by DUPEE who condemned Humbert in his review as "a thorough creep" [1957, 118]; for a sampling of other early assessments cf. HOLLANDER 1956; NEMEROV 1957; JANEWAY 1958; PRITCHETT 1959). Here, we may again detect two lines of argumentation, either of which demands a separate treatment.

(i) The first question concerns Humbert's own awareness of the stylistic patterns hidden in his discourse. This is a problem that has been approached in an analytic manner by PROFFER (1968a), who first defines Humbert as merely "the ostensible narrator" in the novel (cf. 9), further describing his narrative voice as "a deft ventriloquistic trick, with [the author's] modified voice still quite recognizable" (82). Proffer's practical analyses then turn up several instances which in his view reveal the presence of the author behind Humbert's seeming stylistic control.[73] That "the parodies and involuted patterning in *Lolita* [. . .] [do] not literally emanate from [Humbert's] mind", is argued also by APPEL (1968, 30), whose influential discussions have determined the course taken by much of the later Nabokov-scholarship (the claim is rehearsed by Appel in 1967c; 1970a; 1974, 151 *passim*). Compare in this regard e.g. the following characteristic formulations by BADER: "Although [*Lolita*] is a memoir narrated in the first person, there are themes and revelations of which Humbert is not fully in control" (1972, 57). STARK: "[Humbert's discourse] reveals information that Humbert cannot know" (1974, 77). PATTESON: "Humbert Humbert is the narrator of *Lolita,* but he

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72. One recent example is provided by RYAN 1981, cf. 525.

73. In fact, Proffer's whole solution to the question of "style" in *Lolita* is revealing: "[Is] the style of the memoir Humbert Humbert's or Nabokov's? The answer is, I think, both. But Nabokov usually dominates" (81–2).

does not fully comprehend every nuance of the complex verbal tissue which Nabokov [. . .] allows him to weave" (1976, 84). Or ROWE: "Humbert [. . .] fails to see the pattern of his own narration" (1979a, 89).

(ii) The second question – a somewhat less sharply defined one – comes to concern the entire set of values adopted in the novel. This is evidently what Booth was referring to in his afore-cited statement, and this is also the problem that has served as the main point of interest for critics discussing Humbert's narratorial unreliability: the extent to which his ethical and ideological code diverges from that assigned to the author behind the comprehensive text.[74] Overtly Boothian terminology has been applied e.g. by UPHAUS: "[Humbert] is certainly an 'unreliable' narrator, in that he surely does not mirror the author's values" (1967, 108). Similarly BADER writes that "Nabokov's moral condemnation always hovers around Humbert's rhetoric" (1972, 79). Related assessments, stated either directly or underlying a chosen approach, would be too numerous to tabulate here (e.g. TWITCHELL 1974, 273; E. BRUSS 1976, 129; PIFER 1980, 108; CLIFTON 1982; FROSCH 1982).

Such approaches have been augmented in a rather superb analysis of the novel by TAMIR-GHEZ (1979), who brings the whole arsenal of recent narratological developments to bear upon her main thesis: that Humbert deliberately plays with his first audience (the jurors) in order to win for himself the sympathy of the general reading public (esp. 77–9 *passim*). It will be noticed, however, that while this interpretation has the advantage of accounting for the shifting nature of Humbert's addressees, in the end his discourse is still given the status of no more than a farcical "defense". This is where Tamir-Ghez's otherwise admirable reading will diverge from the one we are proposing here. All her theoretical acumen notwithstanding, the thesis that she comes up with is but a close notational variant of Booth's foregoing formula:

> While all the efforts of the *narrator* to win over the reader fail, it is the *author* who finally wins us over [. . .]. [*Lolita*] demonstrates how perfectly a skilled author can control his narrative, even when he [. . .] giv[es] an unreliable narrator full control over the whole discourse.
> (66; emphases in the text)

It would be folly, of course, to attempt "refuting" all such formulations by previous critics. Humbert is indeed a protagonist whom one finds far from irreproachable – in terms of values as well as pattern-deciphering skills – answering in many ways to the description volunteered by John Ray in his Foreword: "a shining example of moral leprosy" (6).

And nonetheless, I would maintain that the problem requires some additional thinking. As in VN's other memoiristic narratives, so here a clear-cut division must again be made between the status of the protagonist as a *narrating* agent and as an agent *perceiving* the events inside the narrated history (cf. above 1.1.1.). Critics debating over the significance of *Lolita* have almost as a rule confused the two functions of the protagonist – the

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74. The problem no doubt also stems from VN's own statements outside the novel. "My creature Humbert is a foreigner and an anarchist" – he writes in "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" – "there are many things, besides nymphets, in which I disagree with him" (*L*, 305; cf. also *SO*, 94).

"two Humberts" in the novel – often attributing traits logically belonging to the one also to the other. Consequently, not only Humbert's role as the teller of the tale has become muddled, but also the nature of his relationship with the fictive Ne-agents. It is mainly by keeping the focus on the latter that I now attempt to show that the teller in *Lolita* may finally be much closer to his maker than we have so far thought him to be.[75]

Humbert as a Mystery Novelist

Let us first examine the range of Humbert's stylistic control over his discourse. Here, as with any other Nabokovian novel, the question will again concern the network of internal *correlations* implanted between diverse sections of the narrative. Humbert himself points toward this side of his discourse when he mentions "[the] dazzling coincidences that logicians loathe and poets love" (32). It will be enough to list a few representative samples.

Like many novels by the author – most notably *Despair, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Pale Fire – Lolita* is in part an emulation of the narrative techniques found in a standard "mystery story". There are many allusions in the text to the great classics of mystery fiction: Christie (17); Conan Doyle (64); Leblanc (244) – not to mention the multiple parodies of Poe thought up by Humbert all along his narration ("I [. . .] Mr Edgar H. Humbert" [75] as he writes at one point). There are also numerous takeoffs of particular devices. "In my youth I once read a French detective tale where the clues were actually in italics" (206), asserts Humbert, all but prodding the reader to search for corresponding clues from his own narrative. On the other hand, it would seem that unlike N-agents in conventional detective novels, who are even at best only novelists *manqués* (Conan Doyle's "Watson", Christie's "Hastings"), Humbert emerges as a fully conscious manipulator of the mystery-making devices in his own right. It is this fact that becomes needlessly obscured with the above Proffer-Appel line of reading, since here the assumption would be that the entire game of detection has been hidden in the text *despite* Humbert's efforts.[76] We must appeal to some specific instances in the game to see where such a hypothesis would lead us.

Take the main mystery in the novel, constructed around the identity of Humbert's rival Clare Quilty. Contrary to the usual setting in detective tales, we notice, in *Lolita* it is the name of the victim – rather than that of the killer – that proves to be the most productive source for compositional play in the narrative. Already the pseudonym

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75. Among the very few exceptions, either in the camp of practical critics or theoreticians, CHATMAN (1978, cf. 234) has previously opted for Humbert's reliability. Still, one may find even his offered proof – that Humbert can hope to "unburden" himself only by staying reliable – unconvincing, for clearly there is a more profound motivation behind the narrative act than this. For other related argumentations cf. JOSIPOVICI 1964; MERRILL 1979, 446–54. I have myself tried to argue for Humbert's narratorial reliability throughout TAMMI (1977), and I shall now try to sum up some of the main points of the problem.

76. Compare e.g. APPEL who says that control over the system of clues in the narrative would be "completely beyond the possibilities of Humbert's alleged unrevised 'first draft' manuscript, which has supposedly been composed furiously over a period of less than two months" (1967c, 118; cf. also 1968, 30–1; 1970a, 329, 351 *passim*).

chosen for the playwright is a "clue", parodic in its unsubtlety.[77] That this is a hint deriving directly from Humbert becomes verified when we recall that *all names* occurring in the narrative are supposed to be his own coinages (cf. 260–1: "I have camouflaged everything [. . .]", plus 186, 300, and Ray's Foreword).

Less easily discernible instances would range from C.Q.'s hoverings in the background of the narrated history (the poster above Lo's bed at Ramsdale [69], the encounter at Enchanted Hunters [125–6], the Beardsley school play [196–8], etc.) to an all but limitless stock of phonetic and alphabetic correlations. The latter are exemplified by the invented name of Lolita's summer camp, "Camp Q." (64; i.e. "C.Q."); Quilty's alleged residence at "Quelquepart Island" (244; an anagram); or the burlesque French quotation in a letter from Lolita's schoolmate: "[. . .] *Qu'il t'y* [. . .]" (218).[78] In the end, such verbally playful markers are seen to pervade the discourse in its entirety, as virtually any combination with *Q* comes to suggest Quilty's presence in the margin of Humbert's narrative. This is a development going straight to the absurd of the standard device of Ne-addressed clue. All emphases in the following are mine:

> [68] The crazy *quilt* of forty-eight states (149; cf. also 179, 297, 299); I aim at a bland, *quietly* interested enemy (48; 221, 265, 281, 285); our *quiet* pursuer (213; 223, 239); A *queerly* observant schoolmate (185; 179, 212); *Quipped* the author of Dark Age (256; 139, 183); I *quip-quoted* (162); A very *quaint* name (242); A sickening *qualm* (200); Revealing too much through a *qualit*ative sum of *quantit*ative parts (243); *Quick!* (264); *Query* (256); My *quarry* (245); The *Squirl* and his *Squirrel* (248); A futile *quest* (242); As he *quaffs* my manuscript (221); A short but slow *queue* (217); Our grotes*que* journey (224); *Reveillez-vous, La*queue, *il est temps de mourir* (283)

By evoking, in still another instance, "the *face a claques* of an unemployed actor" (156) Humbert manages to constrict within a single phrase the essence of his whole punning method. For buried within the allusion to the playwright's function (i.e. providing employment for actors) there are phonetic reminders not only of "*Cla*re" or "*Quil*ty", but also of of his often-repeated nickname "Cue" (e.g. 6, 269, 296).[79]

Even these examples should make clear the problems encountered by any approach stressing Humbert's incomprehension of the linkages inside his discourse. When PROFFER writes of a related coincidence that Humbert "remains mercifully unaware"

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77. I.e. "Clare Quilty" ="clearly guilty". For this pun, as for many other instances in the clue-game cf. the afore-cited commentaries by PROFFER (1968a, 57–78) and APPEL (1970a, 349–50 *passim*). Such verbal play has been anticipated in *Otchajanie* (*Ds* R, 117) where Hermann transforms the name of Conan Doyle's "Watson" into "*vinovatson*" (*vinovat* = 'guilty' [Russ.]). In the Russian *Lolita* the pseudonym appears in its initial English guise ("*Kler Kuil'ti*").

78. E.g. FROSCH (1982, 173) has claimed that Humbert "misses" this clue even at the time of writing the narrative. Still, Humbert himself quotes the relevant lines from the letter and even instructs his reader to "read it twice" (218). In the Russian version of the novel the clue was actually italicized: "[. . .] *tos*ku il' ti*sh' i glad' izmenu* [. . .]" (*L* R, 204).

79. To reapply the author's own formulation from Commentary to *Eugene Onegin:* "the components of [*q-u-i-l-t-y*] seem to have gone on a spree" (*EO* 2, 197). Humbert indulges in identical play with his own pseudonym: "[. . .] a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark" (63); "Humming, I retired to my study" (194). Or with that of Lo: "There was no Lo to behold" (218).

of its full implications (1968a, 6–7), his reading applies quite ideally to Humbert as the hero of his own narrative. As Humbert himself admits, on the level of the narrated history he never became cognizant of Quilty's fleeting presence. But to the extent that the reading is extended to concern also Humbert's status as *the narrating agent,* it clearly goes against the inner logic of the novel.

The elementary narratological fact that one's "narrating self" always has a cognitive advantage with respect to the "experiencing self" is overtly underscored by Humbert himself in the following, as he holds forth on his former obtuseness:

> [69] I now warn the reader not to mock me and my mental daze. It is easy for him and me to decipher *now* a past destiny; but a destiny in the making is, believe me, not one of those honest mystery stories where all you have to do is keep an eye on the clues.
> (200; emphasis in the text)

He goes on to comment self-consciously on his own narrative devices ("clues [. . .] in italics" [*ibid*]), takes up "the methodical manner [in] which [he] [. . .] had been keeping Clare Quilty's face masked" (286), and – again diverging from the manner of traditional mystery-story tellers – spells out in explicit terms the motivation behind his deceptive methods.[80] Rehearsing the Coalmont confrontation scene, during which he himself first learned his rival's name, he writes:

> [70] And softly, confidentially, [. . .] she emitted [. . .] the name that the astute reader has guessed long ago. [. . .] Quietly the fusion took place, and everything fell into order, into the pattern of branches that I have woven throughout this memoir with the express purpose of having the ripe fruit fall at the right moment; yes, with the express and perverse purpose of rendering [. . .] that golden and monstrous peace through the satisfaction of logical recognition, which my most inimical reader should experience now.
> (265)

To "hav[e] the ripe fruit fall at the right moment" is a purpose that hardly befits the role of a confessor addressing a court of jurors, but it is perfectly in keeping with Humbert's adopted position as a narrative artist (an "artist in recollection" [256], as he aptly says in another connection). Deftly emulating the uninformed perspective of his former self (which is the standard device of mystery-story tellers), while at the same time playing with a range of more or less concealed anticipatory clues, even congratulating the reader for having supposedly decoded one of the textual puzzles ("*touché*, reader!" [244]), Humbert keeps signalling that he has awakened from his previous daze and is now ready to take control over his past history.

Hence also our initial claim. At least as far as strictly stylistic manipulation in the narrative goes, Humbert's position cannot be too far distanced from that of *the author implied by the total design of the novel.* For in their respective compositions both the author of *Lolita* and his fictive N would seem to be addressing the precise group of receivers described in Humbert's proclamation: not those liable to miss all the clues, but "the astute reader" (ex. [70]).

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80. A rare exception occurs in Agathe Christie's celebrated *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* where Dr. Sheppard says at the end of his manuscript that he is "rather pleased with [him]self as a writer" (CHRISTIE 1926, 220). Humbert voices precisely the same sentiment in ex. [70].

How does this relate to the question of Humbert's values? I propose that here, too, our distinction between "two Humberts" is operative. On one hand, we have the evaluations, attitudes, and ideological assessments put forward from the position of Humbert Humbert as a hero inside his own narrative (for convenience, marked here as HH_1); on the other hand, there are the assessments expressed directly in his narrating voice (HH_2). As it seems to me, it was primarily the first agent that VN himself was referring to when he wrote in his often-quoted Afterword that "there are many things, besides nymphets, in which [he] disagree[s] with [Humbert]" ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L*, 305). As regards the relationship between HH_2 and the system of authorial values, however, this is a more complicated matter, demanding from us a separate scrutiny. (Noticeably, as N, Humbert is no longer interested even in nymphets. "I hope it will be a boy" [300], he says in his last narratorial address to pregnant Lolita – explicitly countering here his previous prospects of being a grandfather to "a litter of Lolitas" [170, 292].)

Somewhat as above (exs. [69]–[70]), Humbert again points out for his readers the distinction between his two narratological functions. One of Humbert's less attractive features is surely the attitude he evinces towards his American spouse, Charlotte. After a long series of quotations from his Ramsdale diary, he writes:

> [71] And now take down the following important remark: the artist in me has been given the upper hand over the gentleman. It is with a great effort of will that in this memoir I have managed to tune my style to the tone of the journal that I kept when Mrs Haze was to me but an obstacle. That journal of mine is no more; but I have considered it my artistic duty to preserve its intonations *no matter how false and brutal they may seem to me now.*
> (71–2; my emphasis)

The same opposition between HH_1 and HH_2 is systematically rehearsed also elsewhere in the narrative – e.g. when Humbert dwells on his previous abuses of Lolita. The emphasis is his own:

> [72] I had just retracted some silly promise she had forced me to make in a moment of blind impatient passion, and there she was sprawling and sobbing, and pinching my caressing hand, and I was laughing happily, and the atrocious, unbelievable, unbearable, and, I suspect, eternal horror that I know *now* was still but a dot of blackness in the blue of my bliss [. . .]
> (166; for similarly explicit juxtapositions cf. 103, 227, 275–6)

Accordingly, what characterizes the narrative in *Lolita* is not simply the parading of "perverse" or otherwise immoral views expressed from the position of HH_1 (as was naively claimed by the first reviewers of the novel). Neither do we find attempts, generated on HH_2-plane, to literally "defend" the protagonist's former conduct. (This was seen to be the overly schematic view put forward even by quite astute commentators like Booth.) Rather, there occurs quite deliberate *alternation* between the two opposed positions: the one belonging to the cringing and hypocritical hero inside the history and the other to the mature artist who is responsible for the completed narrative design.

In one of the few discerning accounts written of *Lolita* at the time of its publishing, L. TRILLING singled out among the main attractions of the novel its "ambiguity of tone and its ambiguity of intention" (1958, 19). He did not elaborate on this question, but one would assume that it has more than a little to do with the shifting quality of Humbert's evaluative viewpoint. Whenever the narration begins veering close to the

self-justifying stands belonging to HH_1, the effect is at the same time undermined through ironic asides coming from the present, more mature and knowledgeable position of HH_2. The following are characteristic examples:

> [73] [HH_1] Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did. He had the utmost respect for ordinary children, with their purity and vulnerability, and under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a child, [HH_2] if there was the least risk of a row.
> (21)

> [74] [HH_1] I itemize these sunny nothings mainly to prove to my judges that I did everything in my power to give my Lolita a really good time. How charming it was to see her, a child herself, showing another child some of her few accomplishments, such as for example a specific way of jumping rope. [. . .] Presently, she would hand the rope back to her little Spanish friend, and watch in her turn the repeated lesson, and brush away the hair from her brow, and fold her arms, and step on one toe with the other, or drop her hands loosely upon her unflared hips, [HH_2] and I would satisfy myself that the damned staff had at last finished cleaning up our cottage; whereupon, flashing a smile to the shy, dark-haired page girl of my princess and thrusting my fatherly fingers deep into Lo's hair from behind, and then gently but firmly clasping them around the nape of her neck, I would lead my reluctant pet to our small home for a quick connection before dinner.
> (160–1)

> [75] [HH_1] She was thinner and taller, and for a second it seemed to me her face was less pretty than the mental imprint I had cherished for more than a month: her cheeks looked hollowed and too much lentigo camouflaged her rosy rustic features; and that first impression [HH_2] (a very narrow human interval between two tiger heartbeats) [HH_1] carried the clear implication that all widower Humbert had to do, wanted to do, or would do, was to give this wan-looking though sun-colored orphan *aux yeux battus* [. . .] a sound education, a healthy and happy girlhood, a clean home, nice girl-friends of her age [HH_2] among whom (if the fates deigned to repay me) I might find, perhaps, a pretty little *mägdlein* for Herr Doktor Humbert alone.
> (110–111)

Surely this is something else than describing "perversion with the pervert's enthusiasm" (to quote once more the misguided critique by PRESCOTT 1958, 17). But even less do these excerpts give the impression of a straightforward plea, rendered ironic only without the utterer's own knowledge. We would be more accurate in saying that the voice emerging here is in itself that of a full-fledged artist, quite consciously manipulating the discourse for the sake of an ironic effect.

Humbert's assertion of his "artistic duty" (above ex. [71]) is not to be taken lightly by the reader, for it is specifically through his command over the narrative point of view that N in *Lolita* displays his autonomy as an artist. Unlike with most other Nabokovian N-agents, we do not need to construe the figure of an "implied Nabokov" behind Humbert Humbert's back in order to decipher the principal ironies in the text (for another look at the question cf. below 6.1.2.). What Humbert himself needs, and what he keeps looking for all through his narration, is an audience that would be capable of appreciating the constructed effects. Hence also the multiple evocations of the general reading public observed in our previous tabulation. It is only in this way, by dismissing the practical function of his discourse and assuming the role of an authentic writer, that Humbert finally traverses the distance that separates him from his maker.[81]

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81. Let it be added that many of the separate "values" propounded by Humbert as N also coincide with those belonging to the author behind the text. Cf. e.g. his views on Freud (253 and

What is gained if we assign to Humbert the status of a fully conscious "author" addressing his discourse to the general readerdom at large? How does this further our understanding of thematic import in *Lolita*?

In part, I think this question has been answered in our former chapter, where we discussed the uses of *the narrative situation* in VN's memoiristic narration (cf. the remarks on Lolita in 3.1.3.). Like any writer, Humbert is placed in a concrete set of circumstances while he produces his discourse. Unlike the author of the actual narrative text, however, he is *not* writing a novel, but the history of his own life (a "memoir" [300], as he himself defines the type of his discourse). What is more, the life-history uncovered in Humbert's narrative may surely be deemed a disaster by any standards: burdened by his unorthodox sexual tastes for his entire adulthood, Humbert has finally managed to fulfil his dreams in an union with the twelve-year-old Lolita. But in order to accomplish this, he has been compelled to kidnap the girl, whisk her away on a two-year trek across the American continent, and in this way subject her to a full-scale sexual captivity. One action has led to another, and now he is in jail waiting to be tried for murder. The ostensible purpose of his narrative is to justify those deeds that have brought him to this situation.

Nonetheless, as I have just attempted to show, the discourse that Humbert comes up with is in sharp contrast with the real-life circumstances in which it is conceived. Playing with a variety of stylistic and compositional devices, couching a large portion of the narrative as a "mystery" to be solved by the reader (above exs. [68]–[70]), and finally disengaging the discourse from its initial purpose altogether – making even the "defense" aspect of the narrative into an object of ironic play (exs. [71]–[75]) – Humbert presents his text pre-eminently as a literary work of art. At the same time, he also discards his first, more practically-minded, Ne-agents (the jurors) and addresses the text to a new, artistically-oriented public.

Why does he make this choice? Humbert Humbert is not the sole teller in the Nabokovian canon who keeps shuttling between diverse categories of potential audience. It was suggested earlier that even in the author's own memoir there occur passages in which the reference is shifted from the naive to the more desirable type of receiver ("the particular idiot" versus "general reader"; cf. above ex. [64]),[82] and to varying degrees the same situation has been employed by VN throughout his fiction. In *Despair*, the parallel with this strategy becomes an obvious one, as Hermann Karlovich starts out

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passim), popular art (38–9), nostalgy (e.g. the evocations of "Mnemosyne" on 254 and 255). Joyce (202), Shakespeare (277), or – in the Russian version – even Pushkin (cf. *L* R, 245).

82. More might certainly be said of the similarities between Humbert's narrative manner and the strategies used by VN in his memoir. Like Humbert, the author of *Speak, Memory* is intensely concerned with the effects of his childhood experience on his subsequent life. And, precisely as his creation, VN is himself careful to explain the "correct" sense in which his passion for the past should be understood by the reader. When the author explains that "[the] nostalgia [he] ha[s] been cherishing all these years is a hypertrophied sense of lost childhood, not sorrow for lost banknotes" (*SM*, 73), his words offer an interesting sequel to Humbert's own reflections on the after-effects of his romance with Annabel (*L*, esp. 18–20 and 132: "I am not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all"). The difference is, of course, that only with Humbert was the nostagic bent manifested in the form of an obsession with twelve-year-old girls.

by addressing his narrative to the authorities investigating his criminal past (e.g. 23, 83, 184, 201, 203, 206). At the same time, he construes behind the policemen and reporters a more abstract public who will be studying the narrative mainly for its own sake. His initial solution is to forward the manuscript to a certain émigré novelist in order to find a market among Russian-speaking readers (cf. 90, 167–9). But in the end not even "Soviet youths of today" (169) will fulfil Hermann's expectations of an ideal audience, for the readerdom that he has in mind turns out to be a truly generalized one:

> [76] Aye, let other nations, too, translate [the book] into their respective languages, so that American readers may satisfy their craving for gory glamour; the French discern mirages of sodomy in my partiality for a vagabond; and Germans relish the skittish side of a semi-Slavonic soul. Read, read it, as many as possible, ladies and gentlemen! I welcome you all as my readers.
> (169)

In a similar manner, Kinbote in *Pale Fire* addresses a range of individuated Ne-agents throughout his Commentary (his colleagues at Wordsmith [16, 25, 81, 194–5], his gardener [292], or Sybil Shade [106–7, 172, 204, 298]), while again imagining an abstract reading public that will no longer be interested in the authenticity of the narrated facts. What will interest "Shade's and his friend's reader" (246; cf. also 155), Kinbote hopes, is the art expressed in the narrative as such.[83] A related pattern of Ne-shifting is evident also in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.* What does it finally add up to?

As regards Humbert Humbert, his choice is evidently dictated by the utter despondency of his situation. As he himself states in quite unequivocal terms, he has become convinced in the course of the narrated events that it is impossible to justify something that is in effect idefensible (his past abuses of Lolita). He is fully aware of his guilt when he sets out to record the history. And if he cannot justify his deeds to any existing audience, he writes in a passage that is central to our understanding of the resulting narrative strategies –

> [77] [he] see[s] nothing for the treatment of [his] misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art.
> (276)

This realization did not come to Humbert at the close of his narrative task (the position of the excerpt in one of the concluding chapters is misleading), *but before the task was even begun.*[84] This is why it has been so important here to regard Humbert's own awareness of his situation as an integral element of the narrative. If we conceive of Humbert merely as a passive agent in the text, assigning all its markedly stylized and

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83. Notice his comment on 147: "I trust the reader has enjoyed this note". He could well be speaking for Humbert or Hermann.

84. Compare: "At this solitary stop for refreshments between Coalmont and Ramsdale [. . .] I reviewed my case" (275). This is on Humbert's way to the final confrontation with Quilty. Critics often overlook such concrete evidence in the text when they claim that Humbert's acquisition of more positive characteristics occurs only *after* most of the narrating is done. So e.g. TAMIR-GHEZ says in her previously-cited essay that it is not until "at the end of the narrative" that "[Humbert's] tone becomes more sincere. For the first time he is now able to transcend his self-centered passions and think of Lolita as a human being" (1979, 82). For a related claim cf. LONG 1984, 150–1. On the other hand, MADDOX has argued that "[Humbert's] words generate meaning: he did not understand himself or Lolita until he began to write" (1983, 65). I concur with the latter view. For my previous remarks on the same question cf. TAMMI 1977, 219–21 *passim.*

compositional features to the figure of "Nabokov", much of the poignancy underlying the narration is immediately lost. If we, by the same token, disregard Humbert's own efforts to make contact with the general reading public, the novel is soon reduced to a mere assemblage of verbal ploys. For it is solely through his control over "articulate art" that Humbert may hope to counter the horror and disappointments belonging to his surrounding reality.

Humbert will never prevail on the level of his real life, for if his jurors have their way he will be condemned. Neither will Hermann Karlovich persuade his real-life readers of the artistry inherent in his crime. Kinbote will not make his readers believe in the authenticity of Zembla. V will not convince anyone that his version of Sebastian Knight's life is the "real" one. Therefore each of them chooses to transform the private illusion into a public one by making it function in a literary text. This is one of the most persistent patterns in Nabokovian narration.[85]

But it is also suggested that where N-agents fail with their concrete audience, they may still be more successful in reaching the readerdom at large through the sheer artistry of their narration. In this, at any rate, Humbert Humbert's aims turn out to coincide with the pervading concerns in all Nabokovian writing. "The refuge of art" (300) is evoked still in Humbert's final clauses. And as the superiority of literary structuring once more establishes itself as the dominant theme of the author's novels, as the role assigned to the teller approaches the governing role of a creator, we ourselves – as readers of the novel – find ourselves adopting the position of those "future readers" for whom the narrative has been all along intended.[86]

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85. The earliest expression of this pattern may be traced back to *The Eye,* where it is the hapless Smurov who fails to construct a favorable identity for himself in the eyes of his concrete audience (the circle of émigrés for whom he performs). His concluding words are again directed far beyond the small circle at 5 Peacock Street:

> I am happy – yes, happy! What more can I do to prove it, how to proclaim that I am happy? Oh, to shout it so that all of you believe me at last, you cruel, smug people . . .
> (106–7)

To my mind, such instances present a purely narratological variant of the formula previously suggested by the émigré critics Vejdle and Khodasevich to account for VN's Russian fiction (the Vejdle-Khodasevich hypothesis in Introduction [0.4.]). As VEJDLE writes on the early Nabokovian heroes: they are "all [. . .] diverse but generically related symbols of the creator, artist, and poet" (1936, 239). We should add that not only the heroes, but also a number of N-agents in the canon present themselves to us as "artists" in diverse guises. And, what is more, the definition extends to the level of Nabokovian *readers,* for in the author's fiction even the most prosaic of Ne-agents – jurors, policemen, readers of scholarly commentaries, and so forth – may always disclose behind them other readers studying the narrative as a work of art.

86. I find the best description of the response evoked by Humbert in his readers from VN's own lecture on *Don Quixote:*

> We do not laugh at him any longer. His blazon is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle, forlorn, pure, unselfish, and gallant. The parody has become a paragon.
> (*Lectures 3,* 112)

Humbert Humbert is of course a most Quixotean protagonist. But it is also remarkable that in *Lolita* the transformation of "parody" into "paragon" becomes possible only when the protagonist himself ascends from the role of a passive hero to that of a fully conscious narrative artist.

6

THE AUTHOR'S DIMENSION

6.1. *The N-IA Opposition: Uses of Parodic* ***Skaz***

6.1.1. On The Opposition

In my concluding chapter I shall be discussing two main cases where "author" becomes applicable as a narratological concept. These include, briefly:

(i) Variations of the standard scheme of "unreliable" narration, where the cognitive, perceptual, or evaluative positions assigned to N in a given text do not coincide with the controlling position of the author. Hence the abbreviation IA to denote the author's *implied* status in all further instances to be studied here. (A fuller exposition of this notion has been given in 4.1.).

(ii) Instances in which N-agent's own fictive status, or the status of the actual narrative text as an author-controlled fiction, becomes an object of self-referential play. Here it will be our notion of an authorial *persona* presiding over the comprehensive opus that is made to prove its usefulness. (For the notion cf. 4.2.).

The present section will focus primarily on the first set of problems (i), while questions connected with (ii) constitute the subject in the latter half of this chapter. It will be suggested throughout that even while either instance is at least latently present in all narrative fiction (in the sense that no fictive N, no matter how reliable, can "be" the author of the actual text), in Nabokovian writing the distinction between narratorial and authorial elements is foregrounded to a point where a clear-cut *opposition* between N-agents and their maker begins to emerge.

The Author and His N-Agents

Preliminarily, let us take notice of some instances where this distinction has, in effect, been overlooked. Critics have always been wont to equate views propounded by VN's fictive protagonists with those belonging to the author himself. Fyodor's view on "parody" in *The Gift* (191–1) is assigned directly to his maker by APPEL (1967c, 116–17), as is Shade's statement on the powers of imagination in *Pale Fire* ("Pale Fire", ll. 215–20; 40–1) by ALBRIGHT (1981, 75). Udo Conrad's reluctance to part with his native German in *Laughter in the Dark* (138) is seen as an expression of VN's own attitude towards his mother tongue (BODENSTEIN 1977, 10); Van Veen's "theory of time" in *Ada* (536–40) is read as VN's own (LEONARD 1970, 137–8; RAMPTON 1984, 141–2); and one critic (ROWE 1971a, x) blandly lists statements on "art and

deception" from Hermann in *Despair,* Rex in *Laughter in the Dark,* Fyodor in *The Gift,* and VN himself with no further qualification.[1]

In many cases, no actual harm is caused by such equations (I am aware of having indulged in more than a few of them myself in the foregoing chapters), for if the notions put forward by N in a given text are not expressly contradicted elsewhere in the canon, there is a certain logic in assigning these notions also to the "authorial" position.[2] It is rather when such textual grounds are ignored altogether, with the result that *any* statement by N is taken to present the author's own stand, that the approach leads to full-scale distortion.[3] The harm becomes doubled if it is first assumed that certain of VN's protagonists are created merely for the sake of promoting authorial values, after which his fiction is criticized *in toto* for its schematic narrative structure. This line of argumentation is typified by the peculiar "equivalent"-theory propounded by FOWLER in his book-length study on the question (1974). As it is maintained here – and I am using his argumentation to sum up many a less lucidly-put assessment:

> Perhaps the most important constant within Nabokov's longer fiction is the 'equivalent' – a character who is a male genius, usually of European birth, and whose capabilities, humor, and taste are such that [. . .] he could have conceived and written not only the work in which he appears but the rest of the canon as well. [. . .] Nabokov's use of a favorite would not be exceptionally important in itself except for a corollary aspect: [. . .] the Nabokovian equivalent is not allowed any failings at all [. . .]. Nabokov's insistence on the integrity, prejudices, success, brilliance, and moral superiority of the authorial favorite at the expense of all other novelistic considerations creates a radical displacement in the narrative structure that surrounds the favorite, and severely limits the possibilities of development.
> (14)

It will be suggested all through the following discussion that any such theory[4] is of only very limited relevance to the studied corpus. Undoubtedly there are protagonists in the canon (Sebastian Knight in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* Cincinnatus C. in *Invitation to a Beheading,* Fyodor in *The Gift,* and so forth) who are closer to the authorial norms than some others (Mr. Goodman, M'sieur Pierre, Shchyogolev). But I would still claim that in a typically Nabokovian narrative no *narrating* protagonist is

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1. In his more recent study ROWE (1981, 9) derives VN's attitude towards "ghosts" from a quotation in a fictive work entitled "*The Real Plot of Hamlet*" – allegedly written by one "Professor Hamm" and read to Krug by Ember within the fiction (within the fiction) written by the anonymous novelist in *Bend Sinister* (cf. 98). This surely earns the prize for simplifying narrative structure.

2. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is is V who says something similar of Knight's literary method: he "had a queer habit of endowing even his most grotesque characters with this or that idea, or impression, or desire which he himself might have toyed with" (107).

3. E.g. when SHAKHOVSKAJA uses Hermann Karlovich's words from *Despair* to prove that **"in *Despair* we find one of the reasons for Nabokov's atheism – namely, pride" (1979, 136). We shall yet see that Hermann can hardly be considered a reliable spokesman for "Nabokov" even within the local context of *Despair* itself (below 6.1.3.).

4. Additional examples would come e.g. from ENRIGHT who is highly critical of VN's "obsession with the superhuman hero" (1966, 3). Essentially similar arguments run through recent books by PIFER (1980) and RAMPTON (1984). I have taken issue with the two latter works in TAMMI 1982 and forthcoming.

given total control over the presented discourse (in which case he would indeed approximate the "author"). Neither are the narrating protagonists demoted into mere objects of the author's ironic scrutiny (which would render the standard case of unreliability in fiction). Rather, one should notice that narrative discourse in VN's novels is distinguished by *constant alternation* between the authorial position and more or less flagrant deviations from those precise norms that characterize this position. This is to my mind one of the truly problematic features in Nabokovian narration, and it deserves from us a detailed treatment.

Previously, we have seen that VN was himself extremely careful in differentiating between diverse fictive levels in his writing (e.g. his remarks on *persona* quoted in 4.2.). This is true also of his attitude towards the question of fictive speakers. "It is Kinbote speaking" (*SO,* 77), he reminds us in an interview when asked to justify a statement occurring inside the narrative in *Pale Fire.* In another interview he maintains that "what ideas can be traced in [his] novels belong to [the] creatures therein and may be deliberately flawed" (*SO,* 147) – "flawed", this is, with regard to the author's own position, which is not inferable merely on basis of N-agent's fictive discourse. Still elsewhere, the author indulges in overt polemics, as it were, with any variety of the afore-cited theory concerning authorial "equivalents". Compare this to the formulation from Fowler above:

> [1] The middlebrow or the upper Philistine cannot get rid of the furtive feeling that a book, to be great, must deal in great ideas. Oh, I know the type, the dreary type! He likes a good yarn spiced with social comment; he likes to recognize his own thoughts and throes in those of the author; *he wants at least one of the characters to be the author's stooge.*
> (SO, 41; my emphasis)

The same campaign against critics who overlook the distinction between fictive protagonists and their maker became even more intense towards the end ot the author's career. VN returns to the question in his 1972 mock-interview, where he discusses the narrative enigmas contained in his penultimate novel. Specifically taking up the critics' easy-going equations of Mr. R – the "posthumous" author of the embedded discourse in *Transparent Things* (cf. above 2.4.) – and the author of the actual novel ("Adam von Librikov" = an anagram of VN), he points out:

> [2] Not only is the surviving writer an incomparably better artist than Mr. R, but the latter, in his *Tralatitions,* actually squirts the venom of envy at the infuriatingly smiling Adam von Librikov (Chapter Nineteen), an anagrammatic alias that any child can decode.
> (*SO,* 195–6)

In the author's last published novel, the memoiristic N is himself made to comment on his fictive condition, while the opposition between his discourse and that of his maker is at the same time elevated into the central concern of the narrative. Vadim's meditation on his dilemma in *Look at the Harlequins!* introduces us to a gamut of narrative practices in all Nabokovian fiction. For in the sense that is indicated here any fictive N can be, even at best, only "a parody" of the artist who is responsible for the ultimate fiction.[5]

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5. Still, in a quite recent examination P. BRUSS suggests that "[in reading *Look at the Harlequins!*] there may exist no [. . .] reason for maintaining the distinction between [the] narrator and Nabokov himself" (1982, 306). My own suggestion will be that such reasons are always given in Nabokovian fiction.

> [3] I now confess that I was bothered that night, and the next and some time before, by a dream feeling that my life was the non-identical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man's life. Somewhere on this or another earth. A demon, I felt, was forcing me to impersonate that other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant.
> (89)

On *Skaz*

I shall be reapplying the concept of "parodic *skaz*" to denote those cases in Nabokovian fiction where the opposition between N and IA becomes concretely manifested on the plane of individual narratives.

The origin of this notion in the Russian Formalist theory of prose is well known today, also outside Slavic literary scholarship.[6] In its initial sense the term was used in referring to narratives in which a peculiarly "oral" narrating situation is simulated. Fragmented syntax, malapropisms, "folk" etymologies and punning, or any other verbal devices rendering the illusion of spoken discourse were regarded as essential markers of the method. EJKHENBAUM – one of the chief theoreticians of *skaz* – specifically singled out accentuation of N-agent's "verbal gestures" (*slovesnye zhesty* [1918a, 172]) at the expense of larger compositional elements as the distinctive *skaz*-feature. Writing on Gogol's "The Overcoat", he further said that here the Gogolian speaker *"in one way or another [. . .] puts his own person on the foreground, as if using the plot merely for interweaving individual stylistic devices" (*ibid*). Similar views were expressed by Ejkhenbaum in his work on Leskov's prose style (EJKHENBAUM 1927), or in other studies written on authors like Dostoevskij, Remizov, Belyj, Zoshchenko, and the anonymous creators of Russian folktales (EJKHENBAUM 1918b; GOFMAN 1926; CHERNOV 1976, 25–6).

This was the first, "narrow" definition of *skaz,* and even as such it would have a certain bearing on the Nabokovian project.[7] On the other hand, we should also notice that in its initial sense the term did not refer primarily to *narrative* features in a text. This was noticed already by such early appraisers of the Formalist method as VINOGRADOV who correctly pointed out that in limiting their analyses solely to verbal gestures in Gogol' and other writers, investigators "did not study the structure of 'the *skaz*' in the actual sense, but only its 'phonetics' " (1926, 238). In an analogous manner, I maintain, if we wish to make sense of the deeper structure lying behind VN's narrative idiosyncrasies we must choose another approach to the question.[8]

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6. Due to a number of studies surveying Formalist terminology. For *skaz* cf. ERLICH 1965, 238; STRIEDTER 1969, 460–4; CHERNOV 1976, 25–6. For remarks from a specifically narratological standpoint cf. the studies by RICE 1975; BANFIELD 1978b, 444–6; STANZEL 1982, 10.

7. We recall VN's own assessment of "The Overcoat", closely paralleling the Formalist view:
> [. . .] its *real* plot [. . .] lies in the style, in the inner structure of this transcendental anecdote.
> (*NG,* 144; emphasis in the text)

The "oral" notion of *skaz* has been previously used with respect to VN's work in two studies: in the chapter on linguistic burlesque in *Pnin* by HYDE (1977, 149–66) and in a more superfluous account of "Bachmann" by NAUMANN (1978, 157–8).

8. It would appear that the notion of divorcing verbal effects from narration was not

For a working redefinition we shall once more go to Bakhtinian formulations. BAKHTIN takes issue with the Formalist conception of *skaz* in a special section of his book on Dostoevskij (1963, 153–61 *passim*). As he points out, in their studies the Formalists had indeed drawn attention to an important aspect of narrative literature, but it was still the actual functioning of *skaz* that they had failed to describe. "To see only spoken language in *skaz* is to miss the most important point" (159), says Bakhtin. He goes on to relate the question to the larger phenomenon of parodic and dialogic relationships in literature, arguing that what distinguishes narration in Gogol' or Dostoevskij is not the use of certain stylistic markers, but *the distance constructed between the author of the text and his fictive spokesman.* It is primarily this double focus, the constant interplay between N-agent's discourse and the "attitudes" of his maker as they are manifested in the text, that guarantees the distinctive characteristic of *skaz.*[9] In Bakhtin's own phrasing:

> For the author, not only the narrator's individual and typical manner of thinking, experiencing and speaking is important, but above all his manner of seeing and depicting: therein lies his immediate purpose as narrator, as surrogate for the author. Therefore, [. . .] the author's attitude penetrates into the narrator's word, making it to a greater or lesser degree conditional. The author does not show us the narrator's word (as the objectivized word of the hero), but makes use of it from within for his own purposes, causing us to clearly feel the distance between him and this word which is foreign to him. (158)

It transpires therefore, after this definitional detour, that we are back with the familiar N-IA opposition in narrative fiction. The Slavic conception of *skaz* turns out to be closely related to the Anglo-American notion of "unreliable" narration, and the whole question becomes rephrasable in terms of our previously-discussed Booth-Chatman model of narrative communication (4.1.), even though it is evident that the two models were first developed independently of each other. (For more recent approaches to narratorial unreliability by non-Slavic literary theorists cf. COHN's notes on "a self-narrator who misunderstands himself" [1978, 158–60]; RYAN 1981, 530, 534; STANZEL 1982, 89–90, 150–2; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 100–3. The paper by YACOBI [1981] is entirely devoted to the question.)[10]

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wholeheartedly embraced by VN himself. I take it to be worth mentioning here that he often indulged in satiric treatment of Leskov, who was surely the pre-eminent representative of *skaz* in Russian letters (EJKHENBAUM 1927). This occurs e.g. in Postscript to the Russian *Lolita* (*L* R, 299). The satire is taken further in *Pnin* where "trivial Leskovian jollity dependent on verbal contortions" (12) is lampooned, and also Fyodor in *The Gift* denies the value of Leskov's "contrived punning distortions" (74).

9. For similar formulations from recent Slavic scholarship cf. USPENSKY, whose comments on "the nonconcurrence of points of view articulated in the work" (1970, 101–5, 126) are clearly influenced by Bakhtin. Valid points occur also in LOTMAN 1970b, 345–6 and CHUDAKOV 1971, 19 *passim.*

10. The concurrence between Russian Formalist *skaz*-theories and Anglo-American developments has been previously discussed by RICE 1975. It is curious, though, to see him at one point claim, in an otherwise cogent overview, that it is "the greatest possible *reduction* in distance between implied author and narrator" (413; my emphasis) that *skaz* is striving after. As I understand the notion, precisely the opposite is true. Among previous investigators to have stated the latter point in explicit terms there is at least DOLEŽEL: "In the *skaz*, the narrating act itself is made unreliable" (1976, 550).

It is in the light of these two critical traditions that the uses of Nabokovian *skaz* will be discussed below. While the theoretical premises of the approach need not be reiterated in every single case, it should be apparent that particularly the Bakhtinian emphasis on the *parodic* nature of this narrative method informs the present inquiry. For if the double focus of any *skaz*-narrative is ignored, says Bakhtin, this will result in regarding the parody "merely as a poor work of art" (BAKHTIN 1963, 153). The same notion was already seen concretized in Vadim's paradoxical dilemma from *Look at the Harlequins!*: as a fictive novelist he himself can never be but "a parody, an inferior variant of [. . .] that other writer" (above ex. [3]). This is why we shall here devote our attention to those specific devices through which the unreliability of N-agent's discourse is always kept from becoming a quality of the actual narrative text in Nabokovian fiction.

6.1.2. *S*-Markers Surveyed

To say that N-agents are to various degrees "unreliable" in the author's opus is still to say relatively little. A mere replacement of this notion by more exotic Slavic terminology does nothing to elucidate the question. There are diverse ways in which N-agent's "word" may become conditionalized by "the author's attitude" (to rephrase Bakhtin's formula from above), and these must be more precisely described here.

To my mind, the essence of the problem is rather well put by PELC when he writes that "in a standard narration situation the producer of the narrative knows or sees the subject matter of his narrative better than the recipient does; otherwise, his behavior would be non-rational" (1971, 4). The reversal of this situation – N no longer comprehends aspects of his own discourse, becoming himself an object of ironic observation – is manifested through particular markers of *skaz* (henceforth: *S*). These we shall further classify into two main categories.

(i) S_1. This group includes markers of *cognitive* and *perceptual disparity* between N and IA in a given text. The purest instances of play with S_1-markers are evidently to be found from the genre of detective stories, where N-agents may on occasion fail to recognize those very "clues" that they are recording in their narration (e.g. in the case of Dr. Watson's diary-entries in certain of Conan Doyle's tales). The device has been used with great consistency in VN's fiction, although here it is often given an overtly parodic motivation. *Despair* emerges as the most sustained exercise with S_1-mode in the entire canon, and we shall yet devote a number of pages to this aspect of the novel.

(ii) S_2. Markers of *ethical* or *ideological disparity* between the two agents. Pure cases of S_2 should be sought from the domain of moral satire, where the proposals put forward in N-agent's voice are systematically turned against themselves for the sake of an ironic effect. (BOOTH [1974, 105–20] discusses at some length a classic example: Swift's "A Modest Proposal"; cf. also YACOBI 1981, 115–16.) In VN's fiction, it will be noticed, entirely pure instances of this type are rare, if not altogether absent. Indeed, one might argue that much of the narrative interest in the texts studied below derives precisely from cunning combinations of S_2 and fully dependable views assigned to a given speaker. Various examples of this method will come to the fore in the course of our discussion.

In addition, it ought to be noticed that the two types either may or may not occur together in a particular narrative: in Nabokovian fiction it is quite often the case that N who fails to perceive the internal correlations generated by his narrative act (i.e. [i]), also strays from the authorial system of values (above [ii]), but this is by no means a rigid rule. Here, we shall first consider the basic instances in separation from each other. The uses of S_1 will be illustrated with an example taken from the author's shorter fiction. After this, problems connected with S_2 are taken up in more detail. In the end, I shall sketch a general pattern for VN's narratives with regard to the degrees of reliability that they incorporate.

S_1-Markers

Our first example comes from the final phase of VN's Russian-writing period. "*Ultima Thule*" (*RB,* 149–82) was originally written as Chapter One of the author's last Russian novel *Solus Rex* (cf. the bibliographical data provided in his note to *RB,* 147–8).[11] Understood as a part of this larger whole, the text can be seen unfolding a quite characteristically Nabokovian situation: stricken by a personal tradegy (the death of his wife), no longer able to face the conditions of his real life, the memoiristic N attempts to cope with his grief by aid of purely verbal invention, and in the process the narrative itself is created. The intended sequel (i.e. "*Solus Rex*", the surviving Chapter Two of the novel [*RB,* 185–218]) presents the beginning of this substitutionary fantasy: a chronicle dealing with the imaginary kingdom of "Thule", in the plot-line of which N-agent's real-life experience appears transmuted into scenes of political intrigue, romantic adventure, and sexual comedy. The continuation of the novel beyond its two first chapters, VN says in his introductory note, remained unwritten ("[. . .] I never went back" [*RB,* 147]).

Outside this incomplete scheme, however, "*Ultima Thule*" emerges as a self-contained narrative whole in its own right. It is mainly when read in this manner (i.e. as an autonomous story)[12] that the narrative provides a rather apt example of play with N-agent's perceptual limitations, illustrating for us that peculiar pattern that we are here looking for.

Indeed, it would appear that problems of perception constitute the central subject matter in the story. Couching the discourse in the form of an epistle to his dead wife, N (named "Sineusov" on 153) recounts the history of his attempts to establish contact with the world on the other side – to detect, as he says, "a glimmer of identity beyond the grave" (176).[13] As it develops, Sineusov has gone so far as to seek the aid of a

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11. The text was written in 1939–40, and its completion was hampered by the author's emigration to USA in May 1940. The Russian version was separately printed in 1942 in the émigré journal *Novyj zhurnal* in New York. It has been formerly discussed by FIELD 1967, 308; ROWE 1981, 46–7. The position of the text in the larger framework of the author's canon is expertly surveyed by JOHNSON 1981b. Here, my interest in the story will be limited to the concrete pattern of S_1 that it exemplifies.

12. It is listed as one of the thirteen "stories" making up *A Russian Beauty* (cf. the author's Foreword [unpagin.]). Previously, the Russian original had been included in *Vesna v Fial'te* (271–313) with no mention of its sequel.

13. This instantly connects the story with the larger theme of the mind's limitations in Nabokovian writing. We recall the passage from *Speak, Memory,* where the author recounts his own "efforts to distinguish the faintest of personal glimmers in the impersonal darkness on both sides of [his] life" (20). For the "theme of perception" cf. above 2.3.1.

self-styled medium, one Adam Falter, who has gained notoriety for his claim of having "solved 'the riddle of the universe' " (163) during a bout of insanity (cf. 157–63 for a detailed exposition). It is from this purportedly omniscient source that Sineusov tries to extract information concerning the possibility of post-mortal existence, and a large portion of the narrative is in fact taken up by a verbatim rendering of his previous colloquy with Falter (167–81).

The medium proves to be of little avail, however, for no sense can be extracted by Sineusov from Falter's oracle-like replies. All his efforts hence ending in failure, deciding that he was merely mocked by his interlocutor, Sineusov closes the narrative on a note of total disillusionment. The concluding paragraph in the story amounts to an overt assertion of the belief that mind will not survive matter. Physical death, Sineusov proposes, will always bring about the death of consciousness:

> [4] But all this brings me no nearer to you, my angel. Just in case, I am keeping all the windows and doors of life wide open, even though I sense that you will not condescend to the time-honored ways of apparitions. Most terrifying of all is the thought that, inasmuch as you glow henceforth within me, I must safeguard my life. My transitory bodily frame is perhaps the only guarantee of your ideal existence: when I vanish, it will vanish as well. Alas, with a pauper's passion I am doomed to use physical nature in order to finish recounting you to myself, and then to rely on my own ellipsis . . .
> (182)

As for the underlying pattern of S_1 in the story, this effect is produced through insertion of covert hints into Sineusov's discourse that refute his proposals at the precise instant when they are being uttered. While Sineusov challenges his wife to "manifest your responsiveness in any way you [like]" (152), he remains obtuse to the possibility that the dead woman may in fact have responded through the concrete medium of the narrative discourse. The latter suggestion is introduced into the text by aid of two related strategies. We shall talk here of (i) particular textual *markers* eluding the notice of fictive N, and of (ii) *clues* inserted into the narrative for the benefit of its readers who are expected to be more discerning than Sineusov.[14]

(i) *Markers.* Sineusov's obtuseness as N becomes highlighted through manipulation of hidden correlations between parts of the narrative. The following excerpt, lifted from Falter's seemingly random harangues on "the meaning of life", discloses a curious set of linkages with the embedding discourse, although its significance appears to be lost on the utterer:

> [5] [a] What, then, would you say about a truth with a capital T that comprises in itself the explanation and the proof of all possible mental affirmations? [b] One can believe in the poetry of a wildflower or the power of money, [c] but neither belief predetermines faith in

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14. This twofold pattern is common to all Nabokovian *skaz*. More specifically, however, the S_1-devices in "*Ultima Thule*" may be seen to antecede a much better-known story, published by the author some two decades later. Like its antecedent, "The Vane Sisters" (*TD*, 219–38) incorporates a history concerning a dead woman (or two dead women: the "Vane sisters" of the title). And as in "*Ultima Thule*", here, too, N-agent's skepticism anent messages from beyond the grave becomes ironically refuted through implicit authorial markers. BOOTH (1961, 301, 302–3) actually names this story as one of his examples. VN has himself jokingly explained that "this particular trick can be tried only once in a thousand years of fiction" (*TD*, 218; cf. also Note 1959, 96; *NQ*, 10). At that time "*Ultima Thule*" had not yet been translated into English. For further comments on the parallel cf. notes 17–18 below.

homeopathy or in the necessity to exterminate antelope on the islands of Lake Victoria Nyanza [. . .]
(172)

In an earlier passage Sineusov has himself briefly recalled some of the most poignant moments preceding his wife's demise:

[6] [a] [. . .] you were already confined to your bed and unable to speak, but would write me funny trifles with colored chalk on a slate – [b] for instance, that the things you liked most in life were 'verse, wildflowers, and foreign currency' [. . .]
(164)

In a later instance, the dying woman's words inexplicably crop up once more as Falter is again quoted:

[7] [a] When in a moment I say 'congruent' I shall mean something infinitely removed from all the congruencies known to you [. . .]. [b] I am training myself by will power not to leave the vivarium, to observe the rules of your mentality as if nothing had happened; [c] in other words, I act like a beggar, a versifier, who has received a million in foreign currency, but goes on living in his basement.
(173)

The coincidence between [5b], [6b], and [7c],[15] clearly points towards a pattern of which Sineusov remains unaware at the instant of uttering the narrative. Even while it is Sineusov who records Falter's harangues, he never realizes that the quoted discourse mysteriously duplicates the phrases uttered by his wife prior to her death.[16] In other words, it is indicated in the text that although N-agent's wife has not "condescend[ed] to the time-honored ways of apparitions" (above ex. [4]) by making the expected poltergeist appearances on the level of the history, unnoticed by her husband she has still managed to transmit a message from beyond the grave on the plane of the discourse itself.

At the same time, and this is what interests us here, behind the back of his unwitting N the author of "*Ultima Thule*" transmits a thematic message that is more profound than any of his fictive agents (even "omniscient" Falter) can surmise – that individual consciousness may find ways to transgress also the physical boundary of death. By allowing his N to promulgate an absolute disbelief in the survival of the human spirit, IA of the text imparts to his IR a diametrically opposed notion: hence also the particular flavor of parodic S_1 pervading the comprehensive story.[17]

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15. Significantly, the references to "verse" and "currency" in ex. [7] are added to the English text to enhance the correlation. The original reads less suggestively: "[. . .] *postupaju, kak bednjak, poluchivshij million* [*I act like a beggar who has received a million]" (UT R; *VF*, 302)

16. He further underlines that "total recall" (167) has enabled him to produce a verbatim rendering of the quoted discourse. This is in itself a frequently-used S_1-device in Nabokovian fiction. We shall return to it in the section devoted to *Despair* below (6.1.3.).

17. The effect of S_1 becomes even more audacious in a story like "The Vane Sisters", where a similar "message" from the dead is planted into N-agent's discourse in an *acrostic* form. When N puts forth his argument that there is no life after death (i.e. everything to him "seem[s] yellowly blurred, illusive, lost" [*TD*, 238]), his words are simultaneously made to incorporate the signature of the first dead sister: S-y-b-i-l. In fact, the whole concluding paragraph of the story reveals an alphabetic game, purportedly implanted into the narrative without N-agent's own awareness (cf. 237–8). One notices that it took the author considerably less than "a thousand years" (above n. 14) to repeat an almost identical narrative ploy in two otherwise quite dissimilar stories.

(ii) *IR-Addressed Clues.* Falter's first mention of "verse", "flowers", and "money" is prefaced by a reference to "a truth with a capital T" (cf. [5a]). Another occurrence of the same motifs comes complete with an explicit mention of "congruencies" ([7a]), which should also alert us to the verbal coincidences implanted within the fabric of the narrative. And again, concluding his account of the colloquy with Falter, Sineusov recalls the medium's last taunting retort:

> [8] [. . .] even if I did browbeat you a little, let me console you: amid all the piffle and prate I inadvertently gave myself away – only two or three words, but in them flashed a fringe of absolute insight – luckily, though, you paid no attention.
> (181)

These are rather perfect instances of what BROOKE-ROSE calls, in her discussion of Henry James's ironic strategies, a "large wink from author to reader" (1977, 538). It is precisely *the author of the narrative text* who is "winking" in the above excerpt – not Sineusov, who obtusely assumes that "no doubt [Falter's] last pronouncement was as much of a mockery as all the preceding ones" (181). The same metaphor was earlier used by BOOTH who talked of authorial "nudges of the elbow and winks of the eye" (1974, 53).

Here, I shall call such instances of covert authorial emphasis – as distinct from overt addresses uttered by N – *IR-addressed clues.* Analogous indices are a staple feature in all Nabokovian narration, and we shall yet have more to say about them in the subsequent discussion.[18]

S_2-Markers

Pure instances of the second *S*-category – i.e. N-agent's full-scale deviations from the authorial values – are not so easily available. From this we may infer an essential, if still somewhat elementary fact about VN's choice of his fictive spokesmen: it is seldom indeed that the truly objectionable protagonists in the author's work are allowed to gain the actual status of narratorship. Or perhaps we should say that *narratorship itself* guarantees the Nabokovian N-agents at least a minimal proximity to their maker. To illustrate this point I shall first take up an entirely straightforward case of S_2 (i), after which certain mixed and more problematic instances will be looked into (ii).

(i) Perhaps the most straightforward example of S_2 in the whole canon is seen in the brief journalistic piece entitled "*Chto vsjakij dolzhen znat'*? [*What Everyone Must Know]", issued by the author in 1931 and never reprinted since.[19] The piece is couched

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18. In "The Vane Sisters" IR-addressed clues are actualized by threading the motif of "acrostics" throughout the entire length of the story. The device is seen e.g. in the casual mention of the sisters' "inept acrostics" (*TD,* 238); in the list of phrases derived from the first letters in a Shakespeare sonnet (235); or in the otherwise unmotivated gloss on " 'Alph' " being "a prophetic sequence of the initial letters of Anna Livia Plurabelle" (230) in Joyce. Absurdly, N even attempts to recollect the title of "that novel or short story [. . .] in which, unknown to its author, the first letters of the words in its last paragraph formed [. . .] a message from his dead mother" (*ibid*). Quite evidently, this is something more than mere "winking".

19. The original text was printed in four columns in *Novaja gazeta.* A partial English translation appears in FIELD (1967, 263–4), but this version omits most of the excerpts cited below.

as a parodic eulogy of psychoanalysis. Adopting the pose of a scientific lecturer, its speaker proposes to dissect the principal woes of contemporary man – his hidden "traumas", "complexes", and "anxieties". The proffered remedy is a course-book carrying the title "*Frejdizm dlja vsekh* [*Freudianism for All]", and the practical purpose of the discourse turns out to be in finding a market for the product.

Hardly profound in itself, this small parody nonetheless looks forward to some pervading concerns in the author's subsequent canon. As should be evident, the very absurdity of the claims put forward by the speaker would already serve to discredit him even if we knew nothing of VN's own attitude towards psychoanalysis. But, more interestingly, the speaker's anti-Nabokov bias also becomes specified through intertextual correlations with statements occurring *elsewhere* in the author's canon – beginning with the opening clause:

> [9] *Nasha epokha, gospoda, – epokha velikikh potrjasenij, trevog i poiskov.*

The inflated style alone should alert us to the possibility of parody: *"Our epoch, gentlemen, is an epoch of great agitations, apprehensions, and searching". In the next sentence the speaker incongruously evokes figures from antiquity to support his "our epoch" -thesis. These are strictly internal markers of S_2.[20] At the same time, covert intertextual links are being activated behind the back of the unwitting speaker. Just one year prior to the printing of "*Chto vsjakij dolzhen znat'*?", the author had himself addressed the question of "epoch" in his own voice. Replying to an émigré interviewer's query on Proust's presumed influence on the contemporary literary scene, VN asserts:

> [10] *Mne kazhetsja, chto sudit' ob etom nevozmozhno:* epokha nikogda ne byvaet 'nashej'. *Mne neizvestno, v kakuju epokhu budushchij istorik nas ukhlopaet i kakie najdjot dlja nejo primety. K primetam, nakhodimym sovremennikami, ja otnoshus' podozritel'no.*[21]
> (Interview 1930, 274; my emphasis)

In an analogous fashion, virtually all other proposals put forward by the Freudian speaker find their antipodes elsewhere in Nabokovian writing. This is the case with the banal generalizations anent a "post-war" mentality ("*Do vojny u ljudej byla moral'* [. . .] [*Before the war people still had a morality]"), which antecede the satirized sociological theorizing in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:*

> [11] 'The War', says Mr. Goodman without so much as a blush, 'had changed the face of the universe'.
> (9)

The speaker's psychoanalytic deductions represent a staple target of Nabokovian satire (e.g. "*horror tigris*" is blandly diagnosed as a "trauma" caused by a picture of a tiger

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20. Not entirely unlike those isolated by BOOTH (1974, 105–20) in his discussion of Swift's "A Modest Proposal". I assume that Swiftian satire might well be one of the models looming behind VN's modernized version of the mock-essay.

21. "It seems to me that one cannot judge this: *our epoch is never 'ours'*. I don't know into what sort of epoch the future historian will place us and what its characteristics will be. I have a sceptical attitude towards those characteristics that are proclaimed by contemporaries". The interview is translated into English in FIELD (1967, 265; my emphasis), but the connection between the two texts is not noted.

hanging in the patient's nursery in his childhood).[22] And also the chief argument of the piece – the all-importance of "sex" in one's life – represents a quint-essentially anti-Nabokovian doctrine:

> [12] *Kuda ni kinem glaza ili vzgljad, – vsjudu polovoe nachalo.*
> [*Whichever direction we cast our glance, we detect a sexual origin.]

The formulation has been counterpointed all through the subsequent canon. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:*

> [13] Indeed, I believe that granting 'sex' a special situation when tackling a human problem, or worse still, letting the 'sexual idea', if such a thing exists, pervade and 'explain' all the rest is a grave error of reasoning.
> (99)

In Fyodor's discourse in *The Gift:*

> [14] In the writings of [the] radical critic, Zaytsev, it was comical to find, forty years before Freud, the theory that 'all these aesthetic feelings and similar illusions "elevating us" are only modifications of the sexual instinct . . .'
> (194)

In *Lolita:*

> [15] It is not the artistic aptitudes that are secondary sexual characters as some shams and shamans have said; it is the other way around: sex is but the ancilla of art.
> (253)

And also in the author's own voice in his memoir:

> [16] It might be rewarding to go into the phylogenetic aspects of the passion male children have for things on wheels, particularly railway trains. Of course, we know what the Viennese Quack thought of the matter. We will leave him and his fellow travellers to jog on, in their third-class carriage of thought, through the police state of sexual myth [. . .][23]
> (*SM*, 300)

(ii) The pattern of S_2 becomes more problematic when the fictive speaker is no longer a mere parody – as in (i) – but is also made to share a portion of his insights with the author who has made him. I suggest that this strategy is illustrated in a concise form in the two-page "Foreword" to the narrative in *Lolita* (5–7), providing us with an interesting deviation from the previous example.

The fictive prefacer in *Lolita* – "John Ray, Jr., Ph.D." (JR+Jr: the burlesque name

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22. Compare similar burlesques in *Pnin*, 21; *Ada*, 249, 363, 577, 586; or *Transparent Things*, 59, 61. VN has applied the parodistic formula even in his polemics with rivalling commentators of Pushkin:

> This is a preposterous gloss, somehow reminding one of Freud's explaining a patient's passion for young women by the fact that the poor fellow in his self-abusing boyhood used to admire Mt. Jungfrau from the window of a water closet.
> ("A Reply to My Critics"; *SO*, 262)

23. VN's proclaimed antipathy towards Freud ("Dr. Froid" [*A*, 27], "Dr. Sig Heiler" [*ibid*, 28], "papa Fig" [*ibid*], and so forth) is too well known to require further documentation here. With its parodic modulations, "*Chto vsjakij dolzhen znat'*?" is a central text in the author's overall campaign.

is in itself a small clue to the reader) – is of course a patently absurd figure.[24] Apparently a disciple of the "Freudianism for All" -doctrine, himself the author of a related opus ("Do the Senses Make Sense" [5]), Ray attempts to present a psychoanalytic reading of the edited text. Humbert's narrative is firmly placed into the category of "case histor[ies]" (7); statistics by another expert, one "Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann" (6) are cited to explain the case; and a practical cure for Humbert's dilemma is suggested (he should have consulted "a competent psycho-pathologist" [*ibid*]). Further on, addressing "parents, social workers, educators" (7), Ray even ventures to summarize the main thematic message of the narrative. It should –

> [17] [. . .] make all of us [. . .] apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world.
> (*ibid*)

It is not necessary to go beyond the confines of *Lolita* to notice the ironic inappropriateness of all this. In his own narrative Humbert will expressly lampoon the findings of Ray's scientific authority ("I am sure Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann would have paid me a sack of schillings for adding such a libidream to her files" [54; cf. also 294]). He will sardonically address "the able psychiatrist who studies [his] case" (163) – the editor himself – and repeatedly point out that he has quite deliberately constructed episodes in his narrative as parodies of standard Freudian "cases" (e.g. 36, 124, 163–4, 211, 244, 248, 251; on sex as "the ancilla of art" cf. also above ex. [15]). That the fictive editor misconstrues all such clues in the edited text clearly renders suspect any reliability that his own discourse might hold.[25] On the other hand, somewhat less obviously, if we relate Ray's Foreword to the larger background of VN's own writing, we again find a number of curious linkages between his statements and some unmistakably Nabokovian positions.[26]

For instance, when Ray at one point scoffs at "old-fashioned readers who wish to follow the destinies of the 'real' people beyond the 'true' story" (5), further bringing up the possibility of "view[ing] [Humbert's narrative] simply as a novel" (6), he is voicing arguments that have been often iterated in VN's critical writings. The author takes express issue with "those who like to look for the actual models of fictional characters and who search for 'real life' in the dead ends of art" in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* (*EO* 2, 5); he also takes up the notion in his book on Gogol' (*NG*, 54); and in his Jane Austen lecture we read:

> [18] [. . .] the good reader is aware that the quest for real life, real people, and so forth is a meaningless process when speaking of books.
> (*Lectures 1*, 10)

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24. In fact, the device of "ironic foreword", dating back at least as far as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (ROMBERG 1962, 92), was reintroduced into the modern novel by way of *Lolita*. It has been subsequently applied e.g. in Kurt Vonnegut's *Mother Night*, where it would appear that *Lolita* itself functions as a source of the parody (cf. VONNEGUT 1961, ix–xii).

25. This disproves, to my mind, the commonly held view that in unreliable narration "the correcting discourse must either belong to the same level of embedding as the faulty declarations, or to a higher level" (RYAN 1981, 530). In *Lolita*, precisely the opposite is true, as here it is by aid of Humbert's embedded narrative that Ray's interpretations are questioned.

26. For previous remarks on the alternation between parody and seriousness in Foreword to *Lolita* cf. APPEL 1970a, 324. A related point was made by FIELD (1967, 331), but the narratological implications of the question have not been discussed.

Ray's definition of "genius":

> [19] [. . .] 'offensive' is frequently but a synonym for 'unusual'; and a great work of art is of course always original, and thus by its very nature should come as a more or less shocking surprise.
> (6)

– again duplicates some of the most consistently-held notions in the canon: "Gogol was a strange creature, but genius is always strange" (*NG,* 140); "Genius is non-conformity" (*P,* 89), and so forth. Similarly Ray's censure of "the robust philistine who is conditioned by modern conventions into accepting without qualms a lavish array of four-letter words in a banal novel" (6) represents a distinctively Nabokovian turn of phrase (e.g. the essay entitled "Philistines and Philistinism" in *Lectures 2* [309–14] or the discussion of "*poshlost'* " in *NG* [63–74]). And even the cryptic parallel drawn by Ray between Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Lolita* itself[27] is entirely in the self-laudatory vein of VN, who has on other occasions pronounced *Ulysses* one of the "greatest masterpieces of twentieth century prose" (*SO,* 57; *Lectures 1,* 285–370).

Such shifting between staunchly authorial opinions and pure burlesque is a staple feature of the editorial discourse in *Lolita,* and it would be a simple task to explain it on purely extra-narrative grounds. A truly "offensive" (above ex. [19]) novel upon its release in the mid-1950's, *Lolita* stood an obvious chance of being misunderstood by its first readers. Therefore, it is only natural that the author wished to append in his novel at least some directions to those who might otherwise be led astray by its erotic content. (It is for the same reason that "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*", rehearsing the directions in the author's own voice, was included in later editions.) But at the same time I would claim that analogous shifting also presents an inherent property of all Nabokovian narration. Not even his most parodic N-agents are quite as unreliable as they might first seem. Manifestations of this tendency in the author's major narratives will be my concern in the remaining half of the discussion.

The Pattern

The pattern of narration sketched so far poses a problem. It is not always so easy to determine whether we are dealing with an essentially "reliable" N who may become the object of authorial irony only in some local contexts, or whether we have a case of a wholly "unreliable" agent who is on occasion allowed to adhere to his maker's values. This is surely a dilemma confronting at some point every analyst of narrative structure, but it gains special prominence when we approach Nabokovian fiction, where a particularly heavy investment is made in N-agent's *consciousness* of his own narrative status. (The problem has been treated with regard to the Jamesian narrative by BROOKE-ROSE 1977, 537–8. For other discussions cf. BOOTH 1961, 311–36; YACOBI 1981, 124–5; LANSER 1981, 171; RIMMON-KENAN 1983, 102–3.)

In our example from *Lolita*, the fictive editor was seen discrediting himself with several shows of absurdity (i.e. S_2), but at the same time he could comment quite

27. In the mention of "the monumental decision [. . .] by Hon. John M. Woolsley in regard to another, considerably more outspoken, book" (6). The reference is to the decision made by Judge Woolsley in December 6, 1933, which lifted the ban on Joyce's novel and made possible its American publication. Humbert Humbert has again anticipated his editor by alluding to "*l'oeuvre ormonde du sublime Dublinois*" (202).

perceptively on given qualities of the edited narrative (above exs. [17]–[19]). In "*Ultima Thule*", Sineusov failed to perceive some essential correlations within his own discourse (S_1: exs. [4]–[8]), but apart from this he showed no apparent traces of straying from values held by the author of the comprehensive text. On the contrary, Sineusov is allowed to hold forth on a range of concerns that lie close to the pervasive interests of his creator: the existence of a "true reality" behind the ordinary one (UT; *RB,* 153–4); the value of "nostalgia" in man's life (cf. the image of "fragments [. . .] of porcelain" [152], duplicating the authorial discourse on identical fragments in Chapter Fifteen of *Speak, Memory* [308–9]); or the nature of human love ("[. . .] this gaping hole, into which slides everything [. . .]" [150–1]; "It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love" [*SM,* 139]).

Such vacillation appears to me as a basic feature of the Nabokovian *skaz*-strategy. As I have suggested earlier, it is as if the status of "narratorship" itself guaranteed any protagonist at least a modicum of proximity to the author who is behind the actual text.[28] An ever-alert theoretician of his own narrative practice, VN has himself drawn attention to the same problem. Asked about a possible kinship between certain of his protagonists and his extra-fictive *persona,* he explained:

> [20] The more gifted and talkative one's characters are, the greater the chances of their resembling the author in tone or tint of mind. It is a familiar embarrassment that I face with very faint qualms, particularly since I am not really aware of any special similarities – just as one is not aware of sharing mannerisms with a detestable kinsman.
> (*SO,* 120)

In earlier chapters, we have already examined particular novels in the light of this overriding principle. No matter how absurd some of the assessments may be that Kinbote gives in his notes to Shade's poem in *Pale Fire,* it is still he who completes the artistic design of the narrative (cf. above 3.2.3.). By the same token, we should claim that even an apparently full-fledged Nabokovian "equivalent" like Shade is endowed with properties that divorce him from his maker.[29] A somewhat similar pattern is seen emerging in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (V – rather than Sebastian Knight – as the controlling artist), and other examples would be provided by novels otherwise as varied as *Look at the Harlequins!, Transparent Things, Pnin,* or *Ada.*[30]

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28. BROOKE-ROSE refers to this point when she says that "any narrator must have at least the talent to keep us interested" (1977, 521). Cf. also STANZEL 1982, 151.

29. Is Shade's poem quite as fine as some critics have given us to understand? Or is it at least in part parodic? For example FIELD claims outright that "Pale Fire" is "an important poem by Vladimir Nabokov" (1967, 106). Cf. also LEVINE: "I speculate that Nabokov [. . .] attempted to make it a very good poem" (1978, 104). LONG (1984, 24) agrees. On the other hand, ADAMS refers to "Pale Fire" as "a bumbling poem by bumbling John Shade" (1977, 151). LEVY terms it an "easy-to-read mediocrity" (1984, 87). I would maintain that such diversity of critical assessments well reflects the shifting quality of the voices created by VN in his fiction. In a manner shared by other Nabokovian N-agents, both Shade and Kinbote keep alternately approaching their maker's position and again gliding further away. This is why no rigid scheme regarding one of them as fully "reliable" and the other as "unreliable" (FOWLER 1974, 92–3 *passim;* PIFER 1980, 110–18) will even begin to account for the comprehensive pattern of the novel.

30. Extensive efforts have been made by critics to prove Van Veen's full-scale unreliability in *Ada.* E.g. UPDIKE, in one of the most influential reviews written on the novel, proposed a veritable

Even such an apparently incurable case of narratorial obtuseness as Smurov in *The Eye* still shares some basic concerns with the author, for it is due to his efforts that the purely imaginary materials in his narrative are brought to life. As VN points out in his Foreword to the latter novel – and his assertion might well be extended to bear on the whole question of reliability treated here:

> [21] The forces of imagination *which, in the long run, are the forces of good* remain steadfastly on Smurov's side [. . .]
> (*E*, 10; my emphasis)

To varying degrees, the forces of "good" appear to be on the side of every N we encounter in surveying the Nabokovian canon. This was also noticed in our foregoing analysis of *Lolita,* where the diverse cognitive and ethical failings displayed in the text were seen to be motivated by the artistic aspirations of Humbert Humbert himself (5.2.2.). In other words, it was claimed that Humbert aspires to the status of a positive protagonist in the novel *precisely by virtue of his being N.* To complete this survey, I shall next take up an all but diametrically opposite case: *Despair,* where N-agent's efforts to attain control over the text are ultimately *defeated* by aid of covert S_1- and S_2-markers threaded all through his telling.

That the narrative situations in these two novels are curiously reversed was once more underlined by VN himself in his Preface to the English edition of *Despair.* Comparing the narrative status assigned to Hermann Karlovich with that of Humbert, he wrote:

> [22] I am unable to foresee and to fend inevitable attempts to find in the alembics of *Despair* something of the rhetorical venom that I injected into the narrator's tone in a much later novel. Hermann and Humbert are alike only in the sense that two dragons painted by the same artist at different periods of his life resemble each other. Both are neurotic scoundrels, yet there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year; but Hell shall never parole Hermann.
> (9)

Why this should be so (what are the actual markers that bring about the said effect in *Despair*?) – is the question that we shall examine in our concluding remarks on the *skaz*-practice in VN's canon.

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program for "saving" the text: "It is not always easy, but it is necessary, to distinguish between [Van Veen's] callousness and the author's zest for describing deformity and pain" (1969, 70). Compare also assessments in LOURIA 1974, 473; MASON 1974, 19 *passim;* HAYLES 1982, 31–2; NICOL 1982. PIFER bases her entire reading on the assumption that "Nabokov rendered his main characters [in *Ada*] with extreme critical detachment; they are in no way intended to serve as his [. . .] literary doubles" (1980, 139; for her argumentation cf. 132–57). The proof that has been usually brought to bear on this thesis is VN's own reference to the two protagonists in *Ada* as "both rather horrible creatures" (cited by PIFER 1980, 191), or his statement that he "loathe[s] Van Veen" (*SO*, 120). Nonetheless the issue is not so clear-cut even here. Critics usually refrain from mentioning that in other instances the author has also referred to –

> [his] favorite creatures, [his] resplendent characters – in *The Gift,* in *Invitation to a Beheading,* in *Ada* [. . .]
> (*SO*, 193)

I would claim, in fact, that in his statements outside the novel VN was not always quite certain about his attitude towards the speaker in *Ada.* Compare: "I have not decided yet if I agree with [Van Veen] in all his views on the texture of time" (*SO*, 143).

6.1.3. S_1+S_2 as a Structural Principle: "Despair" in *Despair*

In *Despair,* the opposition between the author of the narrative text and his fictive N is already manifested in the concrete plot-line of the narrative. We might even speak here of a veritable *struggle* between the two agents for control over the novelistic discourse. About one third into the novel, namely, Hermann Karlovich unexpectedly addresses himself to an agent who carries a paradoxical resemblance to his own maker. His plan has been, he tells us, to forward the finished manuscript of his tale to an unnamed "Russian author" (90) under whose auspices it might later be published. But now he has begun to have his doubts:

> [23] There . . . I have mentioned you, the well-known author of psychological novels.[31] I have read them and found them very artificial, though not badly constructed. What will you feel, reader-writer, when you tackle my tale? Delight? Envy? Or even . . . who knows? . . . you may use my termless removal to give out my stuff for your own . . . for the fruit of your crafty . . . yes, I grant you that . . . crafty and experienced imagination; leaving me out in the cold.
> (90–1)

What Hermann is referring to here is of course the standard fate of any fictive N, even though the situation is not usually laid bare in narrative texts. Reading further, we come to realize that precisely such a fear of being "left out in the cold" on the part of N motivates many of the distinctive properties in the text. Not merely the story of Hermann Karlovich's catastrophically ended "perfect crime" on the level of the history, *Despair* also records his efforts to organize these materials into an autonomous narrative. The resulting discourse – for which Hermann himself chooses the title "Despair" (214) – constitutes the novel that we have chosen to analyse here, but evidently it is *not the same* as the comprehensive narrative text (VN's *Despair*). I shall try to clarify this distinction in the following.[32]

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31. This humorously connects with the label of a "psychoanalytically" oriented author that critics had begun attaching to VN at the time when *Despair* was in progress. In his early presentation of the émigré Sirin's work to the American public PARRY in fact described him as "an adroit, unostentateous follower of Dr. Freud" (1933, 318; cf. also 1971, 17). The assessment was duplicated by TERAPIANO, who argued in his review of *Glory* that "the basic sin of Sirin is a leaning towards that dubious German invention, psychoanalysis" (1934, 288). One might surmise that the appearance of such views in print had the effect of still intensifying the anti-Freudian intonations in VN's subsequent fiction. Cf. also above, notes 22 and 23.

32. The overall significance of the opposition between Hermann and his creator, the false artist and the genuine one, has been much discussed in *Despair*-scholarship. A definitive if brief reading of the novel was already given by VEJDLE (1936), who concisely delineated the role allotted to the theme of "art" in VN's Russian fiction. A related assessment occurs in KHODASEVICH 1937, 99–100. Subsequently, a number of readings touching upon the problem have appeared. I refer here to DILLARD 1966; FIELD 1967, 225–37; ROSENFIELD 1967; SUAGEE 1974, 54–62; LEE 1976, 62–70; HYDE 1977, 109–15; STUART 1978, 115–32; PIFER 1980, 98–105; CARROLL 1982; DAVYDOV 1982, 52–99. Useful insights are also offered in PROFFER's (1968b) and GRAYSON's (1977, 59–82) comparative overviews of the Russian text and its English revision. All these studies include observations on the question of Hermann's unreliability as N, and certain overlappings with my own remarks are unavoidable. I shall try to place the individual narrative ploys in the novel into the larger framework of Nabokovian *skaz.* It is my purpose to show that even while there is only a single narratorial "voice" in *Despair* (one recent essay on the novel was misleadingly entitled "The Three Voices of Nabokov's *Despair*" [KIMNEY 1980]), through covert inlays into the text its author still manages to signal his ultimate control over the fiction.

"It is not everyone who is so observant" (25), Hermann writes close to the opening of his narrative. Recounting the second meeting with his false double, he again rehearses this notion: "In spite of my impatience I was as observant as usual" (78). In fact, it is a regularly-used device in Nabokovian narration to have N insist on his own perceptual skills in those precise passages where his observations are made suspect. (One may recall an identical instance from "The Vane Sisters", where N begins discoursing on his "state of raw awareness" [*TD,* 220]. Or Kinbote's ludicrous assertion in *Pale Fire:* "Personally, I have not known any lunatics" [237].)

The ironic effect is still enhanced when N delights in his capacity to outright "deceive" the potential audience. This happens e.g. when Hermann talks teasingly of "the kind of glee one experiences upon making an April fool of someone" (34) – having in mind the gullible reader who has just been deceived into accepting an entirely misleading version of the narrated events. As it eventually turns out, however, this "someone" is no other than Hermann himself, for at this particular instant of telling he has no way of knowing that his own tale will end with his being arrested on "April 1st" (221). We shall argue, in other words, that hidden coincidences *within the very texture of Hermann's narration* defeat his aspirations towards full authorship, despite his express claims to the contrary.

For such a narrative method to be plausible, it becomes necessary that some explanation is given for those correlations that occur in the text without N-agent's full awareness. It was noticed above that in stories like "*Ultima Thule*" or "The Vane Sisters" this motivation was provided through the notion of "telepathic" messages introduced into the narrative behind N-agent's back (cf. exs. [4]–[8]). In the present case, the same is achieved by aid of Hermann's insistence on his extraordinary *mnemonic* skills. "I have always possessed a memory of the camera type" (71), he claims, himself explaining the minuteness with which past impressions are being reproduced in his tale. He also talks of "an artist's memory" (213), and under various guises the motif of total recall keeps resurfacing throughout the entire length of the narrative. Hermann refers to "remembrance, writing for [him]" (188). He singles out "[his] impatient memory" as "the real author" (47), and elaborates:

> [24] I have tried to explain already that, however shrewd and wary the approaches may seem, it is not my rational part which is writing, but solely my memory, that devious memory of mine.
> (170)

Perhaps a parodic allusion to the Proustian notion of "involuntary memory",[33] most certainly a wry self-parody on the part of VN himself, this emphasis provides verisimilitude for diverse instances of S_1 in the novel. *Despair* is a precise reversal of the Nabokovian approach to the past by way of "following [. . .] thematic designs through one's life" (*SM,* 27). For even while Hermann's involuntary memory keeps recording a

33. Propounded throughout the concluding section of *Time Regained.* It is here that the Proustian memoirist proclaims the superiority of what he calls "intimation" over "accurate ratiocination" (PROUST 1927, 222 *passim*). Hermann opposes his "rational memory" to "the irrational memory of [his] senses" (27) in almost identical terms. We have seen many times in the course of this study that VN began toying with allusions to Proust at the earliest stages of his career (esp. 3.1.).

large network of recurrent "themes" from his personal past, it is at the same time indicated that he remains hopelessly obtuse towards these designs *as artistic elements in his own discourse.*[34]

The main articulations of this authorial game behind Hermann's back need to be tabulated.

(i) *Motifs of Adultery.* It is not an uncommon situation in fiction that a cuckolded husband is made to narrate the story of his wife's betrayals without himself realizing the full import of the history (ROMBERG 1962, 119; GENETTE 1972, 197–8). In *Despair,* the irony is again heightened by having Hermann obtusely insist on what he terms "the cloudless blue of [his] wedlock" (143). This condition he typically sees in terms of his being no less than idolated by his wife: "[. . .] she considers the English type of face to be (after mine) the handsomest on earth" (32); "To her I was the ideal man: brains, pluck" (35); "Yes, she loved me, loved me faithfully" (39), and so forth.

At the same time, diverse *markers* crop up in the discourse, enabling the reader to decipher from it an opposite message. In other words, it is indicated that while Hermann overtly proclaims his marital bliss, it it his "involuntary" memory that has registered the incidents pointing towards his rather monstrous shortcomings as a husband (e.g. the description of his lovemaking habits on 38–9). Moreover, it is not difficult to deduce from the coincidences recorded in the narrative that Hermann's spouse is conducting an affair with her own cousin, the painter Ardalion. Her lipstick, Hermann tells, "turned up in incomprehensible places such as her cousin's shirtpocket" (36). Visiting Ardalion's apartment, he once finds Lydia "on Ardalion's bed, half dressed" (114). It is also revealed that Lydia has pawned her diamond brooch to pay for Ardalion's trip to Italy (160). And rummaging through her belongings Hermann comes across "a farrago of rags, ribbons, bits of silk, her passport, a wilted tulip [. . .]" (35) – he does not seem to recall that among objects painted by Ardalion there have occurred emblematically "phallic tulips in a leaning vase" (42). (For other incriminating evidence consider 32, 60, 65, 73, 115, 122, 138–9, 143, 152, 158.)

What should be regarded as *IR-addressed clues* in this instance? Narrative theorists have rightly observed that "it isn't always easy to determine whether it is the author or the narrator who shows consciousness of the extra information we glean" (BROOKE-ROSE 1977, 538). Here, if we consider Hermann to be frankly unaware of Lydia's deceptions, it follows that the multiple references to "adultery" in his narrative should also be read as hints deriving from the author behind him. Hermann for example records a remark by Felix with no further comment:

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34. In our discussion of "*Ultima Thule*" we saw that Sineusov also draws attention to his "total recall" (above n. 16). Humbert Humbert refers in *Lolita* to his "photographic memory" (41); the speaker in *Pnin* celebrates "the unusual lucidity and strength of [his] memory" (179–80); and Shade reminiscences on his youth:

> My eyes were such that literally they
> Took photographs.
> ("Pale Fire", ll. 30–1; *PF,* 34)

In fact, narrative theorists have often drawn attention to the convention of "perfect memory" in autobiographic narration (ROMBERG 1962, 39; STANZEL 1982, 215), but in VN's fiction the device is given a new twist: his N-agents are repeatedly made to "remember" things that they no longer fully comprehend.

[25] [. . .] women . . . now, really, could you name a single one who did not deceive her husband.[35]
(86; cf. also 185)

Musing on his bankrupt chocolate-firm, Hermann again unwittingly dwells on the state of his own marriage:

[26] Upon the table lay the worries of the day [. . .] and among them stood a symbolically empty chocolate box with the lilac lady who had been untrue to me.
(66)

Even one of Hermann's literary parodies contains a hidden clue: retelling the plot of *Othello,* he claims, he "made the Moor skeptical and Desdemona unfaithful" (56).[36]

(ii) *Mystery-Novel Elements.* It was suggested earlier in our survey (6.1.2.) that detective fiction is the genre where sustained play with S_1 most naturally thrives. This situation is also utilized in the present case, for here the main "mystery" of the novel is kept secret from its N almost until the end of the narrative. It is only while writing the concluding Chapter Eleven (i.e. after most of the history has already been recorded) that Hermann becomes aware of his fatal error: having left Felix's inscribed stick beside the murdered man and hence allowing the police to deduce the identity of his false double (cf. 210–13). Consequently, the damning evidence distributed throughout the first ten chapters (13–206) must be taken to occur in the discourse *despite,* as it were, the efforts of its fictive utterer.

Markers. As it appears, Hermann's memory has again registered at least seven occurrences of the fateful "stick"-motif in the course of the narrated history (cf. 60, 73, 81, 85 [twice], 108, 175). In addition, there are other references to stick-like objects in the narration (e.g. Hermann's own cane [72], or Ardalion's comment on "buying a second candlestick" [51]) – all such markers anticipating the ultimate revelation in Chapter Eleven, during which the clues are literally pushed upon the reader:

[27] 'Get in, quick, we must drive off.'
'Where to?' he queried.
'Into that wood.'
'There?' he asked and pointed –
With his stick, reader, with his stick. S-T-I-C-K, gentle reader. A roughly hewn stick branded with the owner's name: Felix Wohlfahrt from Zwickau. With his stickau he pointed, gentle or lowly reader, with his stick! You know what a stick is, don't you? Well, that's what he pointed with – a stick [. . .]
(212–13)

As in other Nabokovian novels, the game of detection is still underlined by aid of purely phonetic and punning clues.[37] Recalling a conversation with Felix, Hermann tells that

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35. This recalls Dreyer, another cuckolded husband, who says in *King, Queen, Knave* of Martha that "she does not know the first letter of adultery" (175).

36. In the Russian text the adultery-motif is introduced through a similar allusion to Pushkin's story "*Vystrel*" (cf. *Ds* R, 45). As for *Othello,* the play has also been used elsewhere in VN's fiction for the purpose of suggesting adultery. Compare e.g. " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' " (the title itself derives from the play) and *Laughter in the Dark:* "It will be just like that play we saw, with the nigger and the pillow, and I'm just as innocent as she was" (145).

37. Cf. in this regard the uses of "Q-u-i-l-t-y" in *Lolita* (5.2.2.2.). Or of "G-r-a-d-u-s" in *Pale Fire* (3.2.3.).

"something clogs [him], something [. . .] which [he] cannot get rid of because it is as *sticky* as a sheet of flypaper" (98; my emphasis, as in the following). In an earlier instance he has noted that "[his] thoughts [. . .] did [not] *stick* to the adventures of the chocolate [he] made" (29–30). Related indices are seen in the recurring "*Ick*"-sound emitted by Hermann's car (175; cf. also 47); in the name of the vehicle ("*Ic*arus" [42]); in his sarcasm at Lydia's belief that "the term 'my*stic*' was [. . .] connected with '*mist*' and '*mist*ake' and '*stick*' " (33); or in his further explanation to Lydia that he has a brother who is "a murderer and a my*stic*" (151). Also Hermann's seemingly random harangue – "What words can be twisted out of 'stick'? Sick, tick, kit, it, is, ski, skit, sit" (220) – functions as a component in the clue-game, for it lays bare the total range of anagrammatic possibilities lurking in the discourse.

IR-Addressed Clues. If Hermann emerges, in this sense, as a mystery novelist against his own will, also the occurrences of the "mystery-novel" -motif in his discourse function as indirect hints from IA to IR, who is expected to be more discerning than the teller. Hermann remembers having once presented to Lydia "some rotten detective novel" (33); rails at her for confusing his genuine murder plan with "some Sherlock Holmes adventure" (154); and mockingly addresses "Conan Doyle" for having supposedly overlooked an innovative narrative device: allowing the murderer himself to narrate the history, as in effect happens in Hermann's own discourse (131–2).[38] At the same time, he proceeds to flaunt his own mastery of the genre:

> [28] Conan Doyle, Dostoevsky,[39] Leblanc, Wallace – what are all the great novelists who wrote of nimble criminals, what are all the great criminals who never read the nimble novelists – what are they in comparison with me? Blundering fools!
> (132)

This is again a double manoeuvre (comparable to Hermann's "April fool" -joke above), for as the author behind the text has shown through his covert inlays, there is no one in the narrative whom the definition in ex. [28] may befit better than its teller.

(iii) *Doubles.* Hermann's ultimate blunder derives, of course, from his obsession with his and Felix's "doubleness".[40] It is important to notice that Hermann persists in his illusion not only on the level of the narrated history, but also *during the actual writing of the narrative* (e.g. on 204: "[. . .] I keep on firmly believing in my double's perfection"). It is this misguided persistence that proves to be the most patent source of S_1 throughout the resulting discourse.

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38. Hermann reveals an unawareness – possibly shared by his maker at the time when *Despair* was written – of Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), where the device had already been put to use.

39. Hermann has earlier defined Dostoevskij as "[a] famous writer of Russian thrillers" (98). The appellation is fully in keeping with the Nabokovian code of literary values. Compare *Lectures 2:* "Let us always remember that basically Dostoevski is a writer of mystery stories" (109).

40. *Despair* is, among other things, a parody of the time-honored *Doppelgänger* tradition, harking straight back to such antecedents as Hoffmann, Poe, or Wilde. This aspect of the novel has been discussed by ROSENFIELD 1967; STUART 1978, 115–16. Allusions to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are ably deciphered in a paper by CARROLL 1982, cf. 88–90. Hermann himself considers at one point entitling his narrative "The Double" (211). He declines on the sound basis that "Russian literature possessed one already" (*ibid*) – i.e. *Dvojnik* (1846), by Dostoevskij.

Markers. The illusion is nominally sustained until Chapter Ten, where Hermann learns from an item in a newspaper that his plan had misfired: no one besides himself had recognized any likeness between the murdered man and his own face (195–206). On the other hand, an assortment of less than subtle hints to the same effect has been accumulating from the very beginning. Consider for instance Felix's automatic dismissal of any resemblance upon the first meeting at Prague (21–2; cf. also 186); the fact that Felix's passport photo shows no affinity with that of Hermann (183); or Hermann's own avoidance of mirrors during the process of writing ("[. . .] the ghastly thing! I have had none of the article ever since I stopped shaving" [31]) – mirrors, reflections, and doublings provide one of the key-motifs in the novel, and Hermann even suggests naming his finished book "The Mirror" (211; cf. also "Portrait of the Artist in a Mirror" [*ibid*], and 21, 24, 38, 74, 99, 181, 187).

IR-Addressed Clues. In addition to the above, there occur numerous overt statements in Hermann's voice drawing attention to the obsessive quality of his delusions. At one point, purportedly describing a third person to an acquaintance, he observes: "You know how it is: a fixed conviction which nothing can shatter" (142). Earlier he has taken up his own proneness to "obsession[s]" (39). And, just as blatantly, he reports on the police investigating his crime:

> [29] The next logical step was to make me mentally deficient; they even went so far as to suppose I was not quite sane and certain persons knowing me confirmed this.
> (201)

More obliquely, it is indicated through the very ordering of the motifs in the narrative that N-agent's concern with doubling may result only from his overall inability to perceive valid distinctions. Hermann himself admits that his "imagination [. . .] hankered after reflections, repetitions, and masks" (80), and observed from his idiosyncratic perspective the narrated reality soon emerges as a tangle of most far-fetched correlations. One notices e.g. the similarities between the marble-playing children in Tarnitz (79) and Berlin (134); between the Y-stemmed birch trees growing on Ardalion's plot of land near Berlin (13, 49), in Tarnitz (79), and in front of Hermann's former residence in Moscow (80); or between Felix's habit of feeding sparrows (84–5) and a later episode during which Hermann tears up Felix's letter – it is told that the torn pieces attracted "several sparrows who mistook them for crumbs" (133). Also the use of the "lilac"-motif in the narrative is symptomatic: the color keeps recurring in the dress of Hermann's mother ("a languid lady in lilac silks" [14]); in the trademark of his chocolate-manufacturing company ("a lady in lilac, with a fan" [15, 66]); in the "lilac bushes" (16) growing outside Prague; or in Hermann's favorite "lilac tie" (24, 102, 117, 162) which he has Felix put on before the shooting (179).

All such indices ([i]–[iii]) combine in the text to provide the reader with an image of a wholly deranged mind, incapable of perceiving *anything* in a reliable manner. Without Hermann's obtuseness, without his callous egocentrism, insanity and blunders, there would have been no cause for the despair he is led to experience. But, to quote another commentator from a later novel, "neither would there have been this book" (cf. John Ray's dictum from Foreword to *Lolita* [6]). I shall return to the latter point in my remarks on thematic import.

Apart from the above shows of mainly perceptual obtuseness, a choice of ethical and ideological issues is brought into the novel for the sake of accentuating the opposition between N and his creator. Placed into the larger framework of authorial values Hermann's discourse presents itself as a veritable compendium of typically anti-Nabokovian notions. We could even go on to say that there is hardly one "word" in the narrative that is not checked by the higher "attitude" belonging to the author above it. (I am again using Bakhtin's terminology: *Despair* is to my mind a perfect realization of his dialogic scheme.)

The principal disagreements between Hermann and his maker will be noted.

(i) *The "Sameness"-Thesis.* Hermann's obsession with doubles also discloses an ideological dimension, for it provides a direct antithesis to the Nabokovian emphasis on the *singularity* of all perceived phenomena.[41] "It was this absolute sameness" – says Hermann while dwelling on his first meeting with the false double – "which gave me so piercing a thrill" (23). Elsewhere he goes on to expostulate on the underlying "theme" of his narrative:

> [30] It seems to me sometimes that my basic theme, the resemblance between two persons, has a profound allegorical meaning. This remarkable physical likeness probably appealed to me (subconsciously!) as the promise of that ideal sameness which is to unite people in the classless society of the future [. . .]
> (168)

Such thrills are obviously a pure anathema to the Nabokovian scheme of things.[42] A necessary corrective is given within the bounds of the novel itself, as Ardalion is allowed to voice his opinion that "every face is unique" (50). In a later instance he is even more specific about the matter:

> [31] [. . .] what the artist perceives is, primarily, the *difference* between things. It is the vulgar who note their resemblance.[43]
> (51; emphasis in the text)

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41. A notion well summarized in the contention that "[the] only real number is one, the rest are mere repetition" (*SK*, 99). This is Sebastian Knight speaking, but VN has repeatedly held forth on the subject in his own voice. In *Speak, Memory* he discusses at some length "the constant pressure upon [him] to belong to some group or another" (186) during his school years at St. Petersburg. The discourse is repeated in connection with Krug's school years in *Bend Sinister* (63–4), and in varying forms the same opposition between single individuals and "groups" keeps reverberating throughout the canon. Compare e.g. the settings in *Invitation to a Beheading*, "Cloud, Castle, Lake", "Tyrants Destroyed", or "Leonardo". Or the burlesque of girl-scout ideals in *Lolita:*

> We loved the sings around the fire [. . .] where every girl merged her own spirit of happiness with the voice of the group.
> (114)

42. The chief metatext with regard to this concern is provided by the essay "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" in *Lectures I*, 371–80.

43. Ardalion is the only "artist" in the novel. He is also made to utter other views that are in concordance with Nabokovian values. "What have surroundings to do with art?" (136), he retorts at another point, giving voice to one of VN's favorite opinions. Compare *Strong Opinions:* "The writer's art is his real passport [. . .]. His habitat may confirm the correctness of the determination but should not lead to it" (63).

"Resemblances are the shadows of differences" (*PF,* 265), says John Shade – another artist in another novel – and even though these are warnings that elude Hermann, they should not be ignored by the reader. For through his manipulation of Hermann's obsession the author has also been suggesting a thematically more far-reaching notion: it is precisely because of his inability to perceive differences between individual human beings that Hermann turns out to be blind to the value of human life as well. (Compare in this regard his bizarre discourse on killing "Leibnitz or Shakespeare" [220]. It may not be wholly irrelevant to notice here that in an interview recorded four decades after the writing of *Despair* the author still attributed the murders committed by the Charles Manson gang in 1969 to a massive failure in "perception" [Interview 1971, 36].)

(ii) *Communism.* Understood in a somewhat narrower manner, the same concern with doubling (i.e. "equality") presents a ludicrous travesty of Marxist ideology. What he esteems in Communism, Hermann underscores, is precisely its inbuilt "faith in the sameness of us all" (30). He also offers an interpretation of his own narrative from the viewpoint of a "Marxist" reader (above ex. [30]). Continuing this social parable, he manages to take up a quite noticeable range of topics regarded hostilely by his creator:

> [32] As I am far from being an enemy of the Soviet rule,[44] I am sure to have unwittingly expressed certain notions in my book, which correspond perfectly to the dialectical demands of the current moment. [. . .] In fancy, I visualize a new world, where all men will resemble one another as Hermann and Felix did; a world of Helixes and Fermanns;[45] a world where the worker fallen dead at the feet of his machine will be at once replaced by his perfect double smiling the serene smile of perfect socialism. Therefore I do think that Soviet youths of today should derive considerable benefit from a study of my book under the supervision of an experienced Marxist who would help them to follow through its pages the rudimentary wriggles of the social message it contains.
> (168–9)

These cogitations are accompanied by Hermann's explicitly-stated wish to find for the book "a market in the U.S.S.R" (168). Accordingly, there are frequent lapses in his discourse into pro-Soviet phraseology, further incriminating the utterer in the context of Nabokovian values. Hermann may for example talk of "destitute and embittered exiles" (30), whose mood he then opposes to the "enthusiasm, ascetism,

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44. VN has often referred to "[his] old (since 1917) quarrel with the Soviet dictatorship" (*SM,* 73). The durability of the author's vision is seen even in the revised edition of Commentary to *Eugene Onegin,* where we find the following:

> Military settlements [in Pushkin's time] were a dim foreglimpse of the considerably more efficient and extensive Soviet labor camps established in 1920 and still thriving (1973).
> (*EO* 2, 78; the first edition read "1962" [*EO* 1964 2, 78])

In *Look at the Harlequins!* it is Vadim who says of himself that "no more consistent critic of Bolshevist brutality and basic stupidity existed during [the first half of the twentieth century] at the literary level to which [his] output belonged" (203–4).

45. A spoonerism reminiscent of many related pairings in VN's fiction: the Siamese twins "Floyd" and "Lloyd" in "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster" (*ND,* 134); the Blake twins, "Jack" and "Jake" in *Transparent Things* (49); the two twin sisters "Ida" and "Isolda" in *King, Queen, Knave* (142). By and large, twins and doubles are a negatively-charged motif in the author's writing. In *Pnin* it is said of the psychoanalyst Dr. Wind that he –

> [. . .] even called Siamese twins 'a group'. And indeed progressive, idealistic Wind dreamed of a happy world consisting of Siamese centuplets, anatomically conjoined communities, whole nations built around a communicating liver.
> (51–2)

and unselfishness" (*ibid*) exuded by the Soviet citizenry.[46] Elsewhere, he may incorporate into his discourse standard phrases like "the conflict of classes" (168); "descendants of feudal barons" (144); or "kulak" (54; the latter term is missing from *Ds* R, cf. 44). He tells that during his colloquy with Ardalion "the thick curtains of the café had won in their class struggle with loafing draughts" (136). And also the reasons stated for his hesitation before mailing Felix's letter are in the vein of pure *skaz:*

> [33] [. . .] it might be, as a Marxist observer would put it (Marxism getting the nearest to Absolute Truth, as I always say) – the indecision of an owner who is always loath (such being his very essence) to part with property.
> (134)

(iii) "*Germanness*". On top of all, Hermann's programmatically pro-German, anti-Russian views effect an ever deepening rift between himself and the author.[47] Unlike Lydia or Ardalion, Hermann is a German citizen (14), and he repeatedly scoffs at things Russian: the émigrés' aversion towards Bolshevism (30); their outfits and manners (145); even their passports – "You have, I suppose, one of these Nansen-sical passports, not a solid German one, as all decent people have" (138), he says to Ardalion.[48] His countrymen he lauds as "musical and steady" (32) – again pronouncing an exact antithesis to the authorial position. ("Somehow, during my secluded years in Germany, I never came across those gentle musicians of yore who, in Turgenev's novels, played their rhapsodies far into the summer night" [*SM,* 278].) In its context, even the Cyrillic form of Hermann's own name serves to signal his essential unreliability: not Hermann, that is, but "*German*" (*Ds* R, 27 *passim;* cf. also the English version: "I'm German, too" [20]).[49]

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46. This is again in direct contradiction to views expressed by VN in his own voice. In 1927 he published an essay entitled "*Jubilej*" where he commented satirically on the ten-year anniversary of the Bolshevist takeover. Here, the state of exile is lauded expressly for the amount of individual freedom (*"ten years of freedom") that it has brought to those shunning the Soviet system.

47. VN has dealt at some length with his attitude towards Germans in the penultimate chapter to *Speak, Memory* (278–9) and in *Nikolai Gogol* (64–6). In a letter dated July 18, 1941 he speaks of his desire that "Russia, in spite of everything, may defeat or rather utterly abolish Germany – so that not a German be left in the world" (*Letters,* 46). For a thorough account of the role given to Germans in the author's fiction cf. the essay by his German translator (ZIMMER 1964). VN of course lived in Berlin precisely at the time when Nazism was on the rise. On the other hand, I would propose that the Russia-Germany opposition in his writing is not merely an outcome of biographic circumstances. For what we have here is also a traditional formula in Russian literature, manifesting itself in the work of novelists otherwise as varied as Goncharov, Turgenev, or Olesha. Cf. also below n. 49.

48. Most of VN's other émigré heroes have a Nansen passport (once held by the author himself [*SM,* 276]). In *Look at the Harlequins!,* the document is described as "*nansenskiy pasport*" (a pauper's permit, really)" (52), and the motif functions also in *Pnin* (46). Humbert Humbert, who is Swiss, reduplicates Hermann's pun when he refers to Valeria's "Nansen, or better say Nonsense, passport" (*L,* 29).

49. The joke is a recurring one in Russian literature. It occurs in Marina Cvetaeva's anti-Nazist, anti-German cycle "*Germanij*":

> *Chto chuvstvuyete, Germany:*
> *Germanii syny??*
> [*What do you feel Hermanns:/sons of Germany??]
> (CVETAEVA 1939, 334)

Despair provides a prime example of conventionally "unreliable" (*skaz*-) narration, but it also transcends the usual limits of this mode. If the narrative in the novel rested solely on manipulation of S_2-markers (exemplified above in exs. [30]–[33]), it could be read as an amusing if somewhat usubtle political satire. If the narrative depended principally on S_1-markers (exs. [25]–[29]), we would have an intricate but thematically still rather vacuous construction, an extended parody of mystery-story devices with nothing actual "to say". (The latter was of course precisely what *Despair* was admonished for by some of its first émigré critics. Cf. especially the review by ADAMOVICH 1936.)

What allows the novel to go beyond either of these alternatives, I suggest, is the systematic manner in which Hermann's role as an "artist" is foregrounded throughout his narration. In our previous chapters, we have referred often enough to the line of reading that was termed the Vejdle-Khodasevich hypothesis.[50] We should recall that according to VEJDLE "the theme of Sirin's art is art itself" (1936, 239), and the view was reiterated in still more definitive terms by KHODASEVICH (1937). The pertinence of this reading to *Despair* seems quite obvious (it was largely initiated by the first appearance of the novel), and it also proves helpful for summarizing our findings here.

In fact, the analogy between Hermann's actions as the hero of his own narrative (as a murderer) and the creative activity of an artist composing a literary text is stated quite overtly in the novel. Hermann himself dwells at some length upon the relationship between his "perfect murder" scheme and a genuine work of art. The analogy is introduced in his opening paragraph:

> [34] At this point I should have compared the breaker of law which makes such a fuss over a little spilled blood, with a poet or a stage performer.
> (13)

Further on, he proceeds to expound the artistry of his crime through a variety of deftly-chosen metaphors. "An author does not show people his first draft" (41), he explains when stating his reasons for concealing Felix's existence from Lydia. He overtly compares the failure of the police to appreciate the resemblance between himself and the murdered man to the insensitivity of "literary critic[s]" (201–2) and tells us that after shooting Felix he himself examined the dead man's features "like an author reading his work over a thousand times, probing and testing every syllable [. . .]" (181). Also the mailing of the fateful letter to Felix is comically related to an artistic doctrine:

> [35] I did not wait to see the rest, and crossed the street, slitting my eyes (that ought to be noted) as if I really did not see well: art for art's sake, for there was no one about.
> (135; for other uses of the analogy cf. 18, 25, 25–6, 113, 131, 132–3, 187, 188, 193, 203–4)

At the same time, Hermann actively strives to achieve the status of an artist through his creation of the narrative itself. In his own words again, it was "in order to obtain recognition, to justify and save the offspring of [his] brain, to explain to the world all the depth of [his] masterpiece" (204–5) that he devised the writing of his tale. And it is here, by virtue of Hermann's deliberate efforts at narrative-making, that many of the

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50. Cf. above n. 32 and Introduction (0.4.). See also the previous discussions of *The Defense* (2.3.3.) and *Lolita* (5.2.2.).

entirely serious concerns running through his maker's canon come to be duplicated and outright travestied in the text. Hermann's inept control over his "devious memory" was already exemplified above (ex. [24]). Similarly his striving towards a maximal "visuality" of literary description is quite Nabokovian in essence. "An author's fondest dream is to turn the reader into a spectator; is this ever attained" (26), he writes, voicing a view expressed in almost identical terms by his creator (e.g. in *NG,* 86–7; *SM,* 92). The essential difference is, of course, that the motivation behind Hermann's descriptive urge turns out to be mainly utilitarian (to make his readers "see" the identity between himself and his double). Also his subsequent thesis that "every work of art is a deception" (188) finds its counterparts in the canon – "Every great author is a great deceiver" (*Lectures 1,* 5; cf. also *EO* 1, 50; 3, 498; *SM,* 125; *SO,* 11, 153; *Letters* [December 15, 1940], 32) – although here, too, the deceptive strategies are used for very different ends.[51]

Even Hermann's numerous emulations of *Pushkin* hark back to the constant presence of the bard in the background of VN's own literary enterprise. Hermann Karlovich's name is in itself an allusion to the shared subtext.[52] His sketches of "running noses" (114) in the margin of his manuscript duplicate Pushkin's famous profiles in his drafts of *Evgenij Onegin* (the drawings are described by VN in *EO* 2, 97 and *passim*). He plays with the plot-line of Pushkin's "*Vystrel*" ("The Shot"; only in *Ds* R, 45), and fragments from the lyric "*Pora, moj drug, pora*" keep reoccurring in several key-instances of the narrative (" 'Tis time, my dear, 'tis time"; VN translates the poem in his Foreword [*Ds,* 10]). Pieces from the latter text are quoted when Hermann ponders his murder-plan for the first time (72–3) and they come up again in related contexts (cf. 139, 151, 222). However, the solemn theme of "a remote abode of work and pure delight" (Foreword, 10) becomes once more grossly distorted in Hermann's handling. On the level of the narrated history, the abode where Hermann finally lands is represented by his retreat somewhere in the Pyrenees, and the only work that he ever finishes is the manuscript of the tale where his failure is recorded.

It is the ultimate irony in *Despair,* then, that having first failed in his designs in his real life, Hermann is again made to fail as the teller of his own story. Being allowed an all but full access to distinctively "Nabokovian" devices, concerns, and artistic ideals, Hermann is nonetheless defeated in his attempts to assume control over the narrative text. It is the combination of these two opposed tendencies – *an overt striving on N-agent's part towards full-scale reliability* and a simultaneous *downgrading of these efforts through covert authorial inlays* – that to my mind sustains the deepest thematic core in the novel.

Hermann Karlovich's "despair" is brought about, in KHODASEVICH's apt formulation, because "he is only a man of talent and not of genius" (1937, 100).[53] In

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51. I.e. when the author emphasizes the exclusively literary function of his strategies – "deception [. . .] in art, is only part of the game; it's part of the combination" (*SO,* 11) – Hermann's express purpose is to "deceive" his readers into accepting the utilitarian arguments propounded in his discourse.

52. "Hermann" is also the name of Pushkin's insane hero in "The Queen of Spades". I have referred to other uses of this particular subtext within VN's canon in TAMMI 1984.

53. We might choose a phrase from Van Veen's chronicle to describe the same notion:
In his sordidity there is an *istoshnïy ston* ('visceral moan') of crippled art.
(*A,* 406)

this sense, the markers of S_1 and S_2 treated here acquire a peculiarly metaliterary function. For even if we admitted that the novel has its allegoric dimensions, as has been suggested by many previous critics, it can hardly be reduced to one extrinsic formula or another. Surely Hermann's situation does not stand for *the author's* despair at his émigré "rootlessness" (to take up the facile sociological reading proposed by SARTRE 1939). Neither does it seem correct to label Hermann's dilemma as "predominantly sexual" in nature (as suggested by FIELD 1967, 226), but nor should we talk here of just any kind of "existential" agony (a loose formula that has been applied to VN's texts more than once; e.g. MITCHELL 1963, 329 *passim*). The despair experienced by N in *Despair* reminds us of the situation confronted by any fictive agent – and in this respect we all share his position – who is denied the gift of rising above his own reality and governing it through a purely imaginative effort.

6.2. *AM-Baring: Uses of the Nabokovian* ***Persona***

6.2.1. The Problem of AM-Baring

A Description of the Problem: Impossible Worlds?

The mode of narratorial unreliability delineated so far still rests on a standard order of relations between "author" and his fictive N in novelistic structure. That is, while the latter agent can be made to utter his discourse in any explicitly stated guise – as a criminal defending himself, as a scholarly commentator, even as a novelist in his own right – authorial discourse can by definition be only "implied".

Above, we have examined instances in which the thematic message imparted by IA in a text diverges significantly from N-agent's explicit message (although the two may also diverge and overlap at the same time as was seen to happen in *Despair*). I shall now take up cases that are more anomalous in nature, deviating as they do from the commonly accepted rule of authorial implicitness: *instances where the presence of the author's persona is overtly manifested in the fictive discourse.* In other terms, the problem will here concern such instances as lay bare some particular facet of AM in fictive N-agent's discourse, hence drawing attention to the place of a given narrative in the larger series of texts created by a single author. For lack of established terminology I shall call the overall phenomenon, seldom discussed within a narratological framework, *the device of baring the author's metatext* (AM-baring).[54] This notion is in need of further qualification.

How can the "presence" of an author in a fictive world of his own making (an entirely paradoxical notion) be concretely manifested? Recent theorists of narrative

54. One finds a good term, "actualization of the author" (*aktualizacija avtora*) in ATAROVA-LESSKIS (1976, 344; 1980, 30), but it turns out that here the notions of "author" and N are not kept sufficiently apart from each other. BROOKE-ROSE talks usefully of narrative segments "metatextualized by the author" (1977, 521 *passim*), while still using the concept in a more limited sense than the one aimed at here. For a good theoretically-oriented discussion of "author" as an element of specifically *narrative* constructs cf. NUMMI 1983. The latter paper also evokes examples from some of VN's texts, and I acknowledge an indebtedness.

fiction have sometimes evoked the philosophic concept of an alternative or *possible world.*[55] According to these theorists, a world evoked in fiction may not be said to "exist" in the same sense as our actual world, but it is still a "possible" one in the sense of being an autonomous entity in its own right. Any protagonist referred to in fictive discourse can inhabit only the latter type of an alternative world. And by the same token, as DOLEŽEL says, all proper names occurring in fiction "are seen as referring to individuals existing in fictional worlds" (1983, 513). Such references (to "Anna Karenina", "Leopold Bloom", and so forth) can *never* identify persons or properties having an existence in our actual world.

This line of reasoning is clear enough, and I shall not delve deeper here into the possible-worlds theory as such. For the moment we are interested in a quite specific corner of the problem. Namely, whatever other features may characterize a world constructed by an author in a work of fiction, it is an axiomatic rule that this world be one carrying no reminders of *the existence of its author.* This rule is observed as a matter of course in all fiction adhering to any variety of "realistic" doctrine, for it would instantly go against our accepted notion of reality to conceive of a world inhabited by its own maker. The St. Petersburg of Gogol's "The Overcoat", the London of Dickens's *Bleak House,* the Dublin of Joyce's *Ulysses,* no matter how verisimilarly rendered in other respects, should be cleansed of any signs that Gogol', Dickens, or Joyce have ever trodden their streets. It is in this particular sense that the milieus depicted in even the most realistic of novels can never be the "same" as the locales known to us from our actual world – they can only be alternative and possible ones (for one example, the handling of the entity "St. Petersburg" in Belyj's *Peterburg,* cf. DOLEŽEL 1979).

In a like manner, the more or less verisimilarly rendered locales in VN's early Russian fiction (Berlin, Paris, St. Petersburg); the American settings in *Lolita, Pnin,* or *Look at the Harlequins!;* or even the purely fantastic realms of "Zembla" or "Antiterra" in *Pale Fire* and *Ada* – none of them should contain traces of Vladimir Nabokov (or of "V. Sirin") on whose absence the illusion of reality transmitted in the text ultimately hinges. What, then, are we to make of the following instance, taken from the author's screenplay version of *Lolita*? At mid-point of their travels across the American continent Humbert Humbert and Lolita lose their way. When they try to summon outside help the following scene takes place:

> [36] CUT TO:
>
> *A Dirt Road in a Canyon*
>
> Humbert pulls up at the bloomy and lush wayside.
>
> HUMBERT I should not have attempted to take a short cut. We're lost.
>
> LOLITA Ask that nut with the net over there.
>
> The Butterfly Hunter. His name is Vladimir Nabokov. A fritillary settles with outspread wings on a tall flower. Nabokov snaps it up with a sweep of his net. Humbert walks towards him. With a nip of finger and thumb through a fold of the marquisette Nabokov dispatches his capture and works the dead insect out of the netbag onto the palm of his hand.
>
> HUMBERT Is that a rare specimen?

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55. I mention here only the series of papers by DOLEŽEL (1976, 1979, 1983), where the applications of this notion to literary study are discussed in detail. The origins of the concept in Leibnizian philosophy – of which I know little – need not concern us here.

NABOKOV A specimen cannot be common or rare, it can only be poor or perfect.

HUMBERT Could you direct me –

NABOKOV You meant 'rare species'. This is a good specimen of a rather scarce subspecies.

HUMBERT I see. Could you please tell me if this road leads to Dympleton?

NABOKOV I haven't the vaguest idea. I saw some loggers (*pointing*) up there. They might know.

(*L* S, 127–8)

Now, it is evident that one may always read such an excerpt in isolation, as a more or less "autonomous" unit, in which case the scene comes to represent nothing more than a colloquy between fictive protagonists. At the same time, however, the excerpt in question does not escape being part of the overall series of VN's published writings. It is only in this larger framework of texts that the connections between ex. [36] and AM become operative.

Apart from the simple coincidence of nomenclature, "The Butterfly Hunter" is made to carry a number of other distinctly authorial markers. The emblematic figure of an "entomologist" is a well-known presence in other Nabokovian narratives, from *King, Queen, Knave, Bend Sinister, Pnin,* or "Spring in Fialta" to *Ada* and *Look at the Harlequins!*. His implement, regarded lightly by Lolita, is another prominently-figuring motif throughout the canon (e.g. in *King, Queen, Knave,* where Franz and Martha mistake a similar object for a fisherman's net [232–3]). And also his lecture on entomological terminology evolves into a small authorial joke in its own right, for Humbert Humbert, like Franz in *King, Queen, Knave,* Krug in *Bend Sinister,* or Nina in "Spring in Fialta", himself presents a particular "specimen", captured by the author for the purposes of his own narrative.[56] All these connections between ex. [36] and the author's total opus combine to bring out the peculiar type of irony that we are looking for here: for a brief instant, the standard demarcating line between the possible world of "fiction" and "reality" outside it has been obliterated, and the fictive protagonist has unwittingly confronted his creator.

The same effect may be produced through diverse variations of this impossible situation. If it is against all conventions of realism that Humbert Humbert can conduct a dialogue with "Nabokov", it is just as anomalous and a-realistic that in "Torpid Smoke" there appears among the hero's favorite books "Sirin's *Zashchita Luzhina* (*Luzhin's Defense*)" (*RB,* 31), or that in *Pnin* the guests at the Kukolnikov summer home walk about discussing Russian novelists like "Bunin, Aldanov, Sirin" (117). The problem has already been encountered twice in our foregoing study (above 1.1.3. and 4.2.). A closer identification and classification of such devices as they keep reoccurring in the author's fiction will constitute the main task of our concluding section.

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56. What is more, VN has taken up the subject of "specimen" vs. "species" also elsewhere in his writing. In his lecture on *Fathers and Sons* we see him lampooning Turgenev for an inexact description of the hero's entomological pursuits:

> On a collecting expedition Bazarov has found what he and Turgenev call a rare specimen of beetle. The term of course, is not specimen, but species, and that particular water-beetle is not a rare species. Only people who know nothing about natural history confuse specimen with species.
>
> (*Lectures 2,* 76)

Similarly in *Look at the Harlequins!* we are told that translators of Vadim's novels tended to "confuse [. . .] the specimen with the species" (118).

Though essential to the Nabokovian narrative strategy, a-realistic devices are not exclusive to VN's fiction. One notable antecedent from world literature is suggested by the author himself in his lecture on Joyce's *Ulysses.* Going over the network of recurrent motifs in the novel VN dwells at some length on Bloom's scattered glimpses of "that lankylooking galoot over there with a macintosh" (Quoted from *Lectures 1,* 317). All separate occurrences of the macintosh-motif in the novel are tabulated (there are altogether eleven cases; cf. *ibid,* 316–20); previous investigators are chastised for failing to identify the figure (316); and finally an interpretation is given that is of obvious relevance to our topic here:

> [37] Do we know who he is? I think we do. The clue comes in chapter 4 of part two, the scene at the library. Stephen is discussing Shakespeare and affirms that Shakespeare himself is present in his, Shakespeare's, works. Shakespeare, he says, tensely: 'He has hidden his own name, a fair name, William, in the plays, a super here, a clown there, as a painter of old Italy set his face in a dark corner of his canvas . . .' and this is exactly what Joyce has done – setting his face in a dark corner of this canvas. The Man in the Brown Macintosh who passes through the dream of the book is no other than the author himself. Bloom glimpses his maker!
> (319–20)

"Shakespeare in the part of the King's Ghost" is a favorite topic also elsewhere in Nabokovian writing (*SO,* 60; *BS,* 96–7),[57] and in the light of examples like [36] above it would seem that such a queerly "Shakespearean" or "Joycean" setting is most intimately linked with the author's own artistic aims. (We remember that in prefacing the screenplay version of *Lolita* the author envisions himself in the role of a director – "terrorizing the actors, *mingling with them in the bit part of guest, or ghost* [. . .]" [Foreword, x; my emphasis]: the plan is actualized in the published text.)

Still other antecedents are to be found from outside the domain of literature. There is a readily discernible affinity between the famous walk-on scenes in Hitchcock's films and the Nabokovian strategy (again noted by VN, who provides in his Foreword to the screenplay a humorous self-portrait: "the placid profile of a stand-in for Hitchcock" [*L S,* xii]). Similarly, the a-realistic effect becomes activated in all such paintings where the artist inserts his own likeness directly inside the presented world: Dürer observing the feast in his *Feast of the Rosary;* Botticelli standing among the adorers in *Adoration of the Magi;* Van Eyck being caught in the very act of painting the picture in a mirror hanging behind his models, as in *The Arnolfini Marriage.* (For a fuller discussion of such pictorial examples I refer to USPENSKY 1970, 12 *passim.*)

In this way, the seemingly incidental mention of a painter setting "his face in a dark corner of his canvas" (in ex. [37]) proves to have direct relevance to the narrative problem that we shall be surveying. Asked in one of his interviews to define the intended effect of his novelistic strategies, VN took express recourse to the pictorial parallel:

> [38] I think that what I would welcome at the close of a book of mine is a sensation of its world receding in the distance and stopping somewhere there, suspended afar like a picture in a picture: *The Artist's Studio* by Van Bock.
> (*SO,* 73)

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57. Another classic instance: the appearance of a figure named "Saavedra" within the confines of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *Don Quixote.* VN has drawn attention to this occurrence in *Lectures 3,* 145.

The conventional basis of the effect is even more self-consciously bared in *Pnin,* where it is Victor Wind who meditates on –

> [39] [. . .] that special and very magical small convex mirror that, half a millenium ago, Van Eyck and Petrus Christus and Memling used to paint into their detailed interiors, behind the sour merchant or the domestic madonna [. . .]
> (97–8)

The Nabokov Codes

Such intense concern with the authorial dimension has not eluded the notice of previous investigators, and a number of pertinent remarks on the question have already appeared in Nabokov-scholarship. "Involution" is the general label that critics have favored in this connection. The term was first introduced by APPEL who used it in a series of quite masterful papers devoted to a-realistic strategies in VN's fiction (1967a, b, c and 1968; the discussion is expanded in 1970a and 1974, 245–55 *passim*). His pioneering description of the Nabokovian emphasis on –

> the intruding authorial consciousness which eventually takes over the novel altogether, involuting it, denying it any reality except that of a 'book' [. . .]
> (1967c, 117)

– is also a definitive one, and it is unlikely to be improved on in any subsequent study. (Other approaches to the question are included e.g. in BADER 1972, 9–12 *passim;* MASON 1974, 142–56; ALTER 1975b, 210–11 *passim;* STUART 1978, 110–13.)[58]

Nonetheless, despite such profusion of previous scholarship, I venture to take up the subject once more with a view to approaching it from a specifically narratological perspective. What I would suggest in fact is that such a focusing may be long overdue, for many critics have tended to take this line of inquiry much too far, even to a point where the most basic categories of narrative fiction are in danger of becoming blurred.

One should differentiate, first of all, instances of "involution" that are still accountable with the notion of fictive N. This will mean that self-referential narrative devices in texts like *Bend Sinister* (contrary to APPEL 1967c, 117), *Invitation to a Beheading,* "A Forgotten Poet", or "The Leonardo", among others, belong to an essentially different category than those that are taken up here. In each of the said texts the artificial quality of the narrated universe is indeed bared, but here it is shown to be in control of the extrinsic, auctorial N (I have discussed this in detail in 2.2.3.). In texts like *Pale Fire* or *Lolita,* as I have previously argued (again in contradiction to APPEL 1967c, 117), the involuted design of the narrative is to a large degree in control of the intrinsic N (either Kinbote or Humbert; above 3.2.3. and 5.2.2.). As a consequence, there is no actual need to evoke the notion of "author" when discussing particular narrative properties of these novels.

Secondly, it seems to me misleading to talk here of an "intruding authorial voice" (APPEL's term [1968, 29]), and even more so of "the intrusive author", as many previous critics have done (e.g. LOKRANTZ 1973, 14 *passim*). Neither should we say that in an instance like ex. [36] above we have a case of "the author [. . .] appear[ing] personally" (BODENSTEIN 1977, n. 35 to XIII, unpagin.; cf. also MOYNAHAN 1971,

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58. Good observations on isolated cases of bared AM occur in many readings of the author's individual texts. For an excellent discussion of "Spring in Fialta" from this perspective cf. HELDT-MONTER 1970.

24; GRAYSON 1977, 113; COUTURIER 1979, 58; RAMPTON 1984, 16–17). What is rather happening here is that while the overt "voice" in the narrative is that of a fictive speaker, at the same time his discourse becomes pervaded by allusions to a higher textual level that is no longer in the speaker's control. In this sense, at least, the author cannot be taken to "speak" or "appear" in the artificial world of his fiction, but he still manages to establish his control over the text in a manner that cannot be overlooked in a narratological analysis.

In more precise terms, all this will mean that any study of the Nabokovian *persona* in action must include a survey of the distinctive *codes* through which the author's control is manifested in the studied opus. The following cases will be taken up here:

(i) The author's "physiognomic" code
(ii) The nomenclatorial code
(iii) The code of "fatidic dates"
(iv) The code of *audition colorée*
(v) The code of games
(vi) The code of entomology
(vii) The code of translation
(viii) The code of the author's other fiction (This will be afforded a separate treatment in 6.2.3.)

One would hope that the following comments on these matters are not understood as a simple refashioning of the naive approach to literature, where Shakespeare's hobbies are deduced from the figurative language occurring in his plays. What will be among my constant concerns here is to demonstrate that the "code" in question (say, the author's entomological expertise) is, first, *made public* in VN's own writings and, second, *manipulated* in a way that gives it a narrative sense.

In the most extreme cases of AM-baring, the authorial allusions are not only manipulated in the text but foregrounded in a manner that instantly leaps to our notice. In *Speak, Memory,* we see the author overtly playing with some of the markers habitually associated by the reading public with "Nabokov". Applying a two-part vehicle (from the code of games) to a scene where he has just missed an opportunity to net "an uncommon Hairstreak" (entomology), VN writes:

> [40] You have heard champion tennis players moan after muffing an easy shot. You may have seen the face of the world-famous grandmaster Wilhelm Edmundson[59] when, during a simultaneous display in a Minsk café, he lost his rook, by an absurd oversight, to the local amateur and pediatrician, Dr. Schach, who eventually won. But that day nobody (except my older self) could see me shake out a piece of twig from an otherwise empty net and stare at a hole in the tarlatan.
> (132–3)

59. There is an additional connection to AM here. The author is toying with the name of his famous American friend, with whom he was to conduct a lengthy public quarrel during the latter half of his career: Edmund Wilson. Wilson had been alluded to as early as in "Lance": "We are here among friends, the Browns and the Bensons, the Whites and the Wilsons" (*ND,* 163). The allusion is verified in VN's letter to Wilson of January 24, 1952 (*Letters,* 270).

In *Look at the Harlequins!*, the self-parodic play is taken further, as it is here the fictive memoirist Vadim who deliberates:

> [41] Should I abandon my art, choose another line of achievement, take up chess seriously, or become, say, a lepidopterist, or spend a dozen years as an obscure scholar making a Russian translation of *Paradise Lost* that would cause hacks to shy and asses to kick? (97)

Problems of translation, entomological concerns, chess, tennis – these have emerged as veritable trademarks of the Nabokovian *persona*. Below, it is suggested that a listing of such materials becomes a necessary tool for any reader of the author's fiction. For it is only after the allusions have been identified that the peculiarly Nabokovian mode of irony in an excerpt like [41] can be discerned: whatever alternative the fictive N may choose on his level in the narrative hierarchy, he has always been anteceded by the author, and hence Vadim can never overtake his maker.

6.2.2. A Survey of Codes

Physiognomy

If an author's personal traits, his physical or indeed "physiognomic" features, are to become a legitimate component of AM in his art, it is imperative that they also figure as a part of our shared cultural knowledge. Hitchcock's chubby profile is recognizable to every movie-goer today, because it has been seen in scores of public contexts outside his films. The viewer of Dürer's *Feast of the Rosary* may always collate the authorial likeness within the picture to the official self-portrait of the artist. And one might even surmise that Joyce's "lankylooking" physique was sufficiently familiar to the first readers of *Ulysses* for them to identify the anonymous Man in the Brown Macintosh (for these examples cf. above exs. [37]–[39]).

As for VN, had he actually starred in the role of the "Butterfly Hunter" in the filmed version of *Lolita* (above ex. [36]), any modern viewer's act of identification would have been a virtually instinctive one. For better or worse, in the post-*Lolita* era the Nabokovian likeness has joined the images of other public figures, film actors and athletes, to become an indelible presence in our common stock of knowledge. Photographic studies of the author have been published by notable portraitists like Lord Snowdon (SNOWDON 1973) or Philippe Halsman, whose shot of the meditative author has graced the back-jackets of VN's hard-cover editions since the late 1960's. An issue of *Time* Magazine (May 23, 1969, celebrating VN's seventieth birthday) carried a picture of the author on its cover, and there is even a Nabokov-postcard, showing the author butterfly-hunting on an alpine meadow near Montreux, Switzerland (by Halsman [Fotofolio, New York]).

Even before this onslaught of international fame, however, VN's visage must have been familiar enough to a large segment of his Russian émigré public. The wiry looks of the author in his early thirties (a far cry from "the placid profile of a stand-in for Hitchcock" [Foreword to *L S*, xiii] of his later years) were documented e.g. in an illustration appended to an early survey of his work by ANDREEV (1930), or in essayistic descriptions that began appearing in press after his first public readings (cf. "*Vecher V.V. Sirina*" [ANON. 1932], a report of a reading given in Paris). It is worth noticing, I think, and a measure of the author's insistence on the "textual" nature of his *persona*, that specifically the latter records were taken up and manipulated in his

subsequent Russian fiction. Consider first this, a most detailed scrutiny of VN's physiognomy by Andrej Sedykh, appended to his 1932 interview-article "*U V.V. Sirina*":[60]

> *Kak vygljadit avtor 'Zashchity Luzhina'? Publika uvidit molodogo cheloveka sportivnogo tipa, ochen' nervnogo, poryvistogo. Ot Peterburga ostalis' u nego uchtivye manery i izyskannaja, slegka grassirujushchaja rech'; Kembridzh nalozhil sportivnyj otpechatok, Berlin – dobrotnost' i nekotoruju meshkovatost' kostjuma: v Parizhe redko kto nosit takie makintoshi na pristegivajushchejsja podkladke.* [. . .] *U Sirina – prodolgovatoe, khudoe, porodistoe lico, vysokij lob. Govorit bystro i s uvlecheniem. No kakaja-to celomudrennost' meshaet emu rasskazyvat' o samom sebe.*
>
> [*What does the author of *The Defense* look like? The public will see a sportsman-like young man, a very nervous and impetuous one. St. Petersburg has left in him polite manners and a sophisticated way of speech with slightly rolling *r*'s; Cambridge gave him a sportive outlook; Berlin gave a stamp of health an a somewhat loose fit in his clothing: it is seldom that anyone in Paris wears such a macintosh with detachable lining. [. . .] Sirin has a rather long, thin, noble-featured face, and a high forehead. He speaks quickly and with enthusiasm. But some kind of reserve keeps him from telling about himself.]
> (Interview 1932)

Now compare this to Fyodor's glimpse of a certain Vladimirov, a fellow-novelist who happens to be sitting next to him in the émigré writers' meeting described close to the conclusion of *The Gift:*

> [42] [a] I wonder, thought Fyodor, [. . .] if he has read my book? [b] Vladimirov put down his glass and looked at Fyodor, but said nothing. [c] Beneath his jacket he was wearing an English sports sweater with a black-and-orange border along its triangular opening; [d] the receding hair on either side of his forehead exaggerated the latter's dimensions, his large nose was strongly boned, his grayish-yellow teeth glistened unpleasantly beneath his slightly raised lip and his eyes looked out with intelligence and indifference – [e] he had studied, it seemed, at an English university and flaunted a pseudo-British manner. [f] At twenty-nine he was already the author of two novels – [g] outstanding for the force and swiftness of their mirror-like style – which irritated Fyodor perhaps for the very reason that he felt a certain affinity with him. [h] As a conversationalist Vladimirov was singularly unattractive. [i] One blamed him for being derisive, supercilious, cold, incapable of thawing to friendly discussions – [j] but that was also said about Koncheyev and about anyone whose thoughts lived in their own private house and not in a barrack-room or a pub.
> (304)

Quite clearly, the elements of AM planted in ex. [42] were available to VN's Russian public at the time when this excerpt was published. His physiognomic traits and mode of clothing ([c]–[d]) were known to any reader of the émigré press; so was his "British" background ([e]);[61] his age and the scope of his output ([f]);[62] or even the Nabokovian "reserve" mentioned above by Sedykh ([h]–[j]). The connection is made still more precise for modern readers who are apt to relate Vladimirov's conversational habits in

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60. A partial English translation of this excerpt appears in FIELD 1977, 191. In order to illustrate the present problem I choose a slightly more literal, less polished version.

61. In *Dar* (*G* R, 359) the English university was specified as "Oxford" – rather than VN's Cambridge, where Sebastian Knight of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* Martin of *Glory,* and the speaker of "*Universitetskaja poema*" study.

62. In the time-scheme of *The Gift* the meeting of the Union of Emigré Writers takes place around 1929. At the beginning of this year VN was of course himself twenty-nine. He was just about to publish his third novel after *Mary* and *King, Queen, Knave.*

[h]–[j] with the author's proclaimed aversion to "heart-to-heart talks" (*SM,* 286), or [g] with his own description of "the mirror-like angles of [Sirin's] clear but weirdly misleading sentences" (*ibid,* 288) – all such markers again combining to highlight a characteristically paradoxical narrative situation: a confrontation between two protagonists within a "book" that both of them purport to have written. ("I wonder [. . .] if he has read my book" [a], muses Fyodor.)

The same situation is varied in *King, Queen, Knave* (in the 1968 revised edition; in *KQKn* R the effect was considerably muted), where the massive implantations of AM into the narrative strongly enhance our sense of the hero's entrapment within the author-controlled fiction.[63] Having just become overcome by a sense of being "in an invented ballroom" Franz observes:

> [43] [a] The foreign girl in the blue dress danced with a remarkably handsome man in an old-fashioned dinner jacket. [b] Franz had long since noticed this couple; they had appeared to him in fleeting glimpses, like a recurrent dream image or a subtle leitmotiv – now at the beach, now in a café, now on the promenade. [c] Sometimes the man carried a butterfly net. [d] The girl had a delicately painted mouth and tender gray-blue eyes, [e] and her fiancé or husband, slender, elegantly balding, contemptuous of everything on earth but her, was looking at her with pride; [f] and Franz felt envious of that unusual pair, so envious that his oppression, one is sorry to say, grew even more bitter, and the music stopped. [g] They walked past him. [h] They were speaking loudly. [i] They were speaking a totally incomprehensible language.
> (254; for a less suggestive version of the same passage cf. *KQKn* R, 240–1)

Again there are traces of "*nekotor*[*aja*] *meshkovatost' kostjuma*" formerly recorded by VN's Russian portraitists (cf. Interview 1932 above and [a]); the well-known physiognomy ([e]); entomology ([c]); or the author's Russian mother tongue ([i]), incomprehensible to the German hero (earlier Franz has already mistaken the language for "Polish" or "Estonian" [232]).[64] The mysterious couple appears, somewhat akin to Joyce's "lankylooking" representative in *Ulysses,* throughout the latter part of the narrative, each time endowed with some distinctly authorial markers (cf. 232–3, 258–9). In addition, AM becomes bared in *King, Queen, Knave* through mentions of "the narrow-shouldered shadow" of the photographer "Mr. Vivian Badlook" (an anagram) reproduced in one of Dreyer's holiday-snapshots (cf. 153), or of "walnut-brown Mr. Vinomori", who appears among Martha's dance-partners at the Pomerania Bay resort (253). More or less identical occurrences are also inserted in *Despair* (where Hermann forwards the narrative to the "well-known author of psychological novels" [above 6.1.3.]); *Pale Fire* (Kinbote's mention of the "old, happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian,

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63. Readily identifiable in 1968, many of these signs were recognized already by the first reviewers of the novel. Cf. NICOL 1968, 109 and GASS 1968, 4–5. In his Foreword to the novel VN himself drew attention to the "visits of inspection" (*KQKn,* vi) he purportedly makes with "[his] wife" into the fictive world in the two concluding chapters.

64. Similarly in "The Nursery Tale" German Erwin – a prototype of Franz – glimpses a foreign girl "talking with great animation to her companion [. . .] in an impenetrable language – Polish or Russian" (*TD,* 53). The error is duplicated by the two German brothers with regard to Romantovski in "The Leonardo" (*RB,* 22). Previously, KARLINSKY has referred to such uses of the author's "Russian code" in his comment that "[in] a manner reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock's celebrated walk-on scenes in every one of his films, Nabokov includes some Russian literary game in almost every one of his novels" (1971, 2). I have studied one aspect of *Lolita* in the light of this observation in TAMMI 1981c.

a writer in exile" [300–1]); *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight; Bend Sinister; Pnin; Transparent Things;* or throughout *Ada.*[65]

Reoccurring from one novel to another during the author's decades-long career, such markers constitute a distinctive narrative device within the canon. On the other hand, it is because of this very frequency that the device is also in danger of being petrified into a facile mannerism, with little left of the shock-value it must have carried upon its first applications. (The same is surely true of Hitchcock's entirely predictable walk-ons in the latter half of his cinematic *oeuvre*.)

In this regard it is appropriate that the device itself – or perhaps the reader's automatic acceptance of it – is turned into an object of irony in VN's last published novel. At an early stage of the narrative in *Look at the Harlequins!* Vadim evokes his 1922 visit to a dentist. Dwelling in detail on some of the other patients sitting in the waiting-room, he writes:

> [44] [a] A corner armchair contained a fat fellow with a nosegay of carnations across his lap. [b] Two elderly ladies were seated on a brown sofa – strangers to each other, if one took into account the urbane interval between them. [c] Leagues away from them, on a cushioned stool, a cultured-looking young man, possibly a novelist, sat holding a small memoranda book in which he kept penciling separate items – [d] possibly the description of various objects his eyes roved over in between notes – [e] the ceiling, the wallpaper, the picture, [f] and the hairy nape of a man who stood by the window, with his hands clasped behind him, and gazed idly, beyond flapping underwear, beyond the mauve casement of Junkers' W.C., beyond the roofs and foothills, at a distant range of mountains where, [g] I idly thought, there might exist that withered pine bridging the painted torrent. (18–19)

Any reader coached by cases like [42]–[43] in VN's former fiction is apt to suspect the author of being up to his favorite trick here. The cultured young man (the potential novelist) in [c] is readily identifiable as still another authorial representative; the figure by the window whom he is supposedly sketching in his notebook ([f]) is Vadim himself, as is indicated by the switch of pronouns in [g]; and the small episode as a whole appears to be based on the by now familiar setting of two novelists caught in the act of depicting each other. This illusion is comically shattered, and with it the reader's smug self-complacency, when it is revealed in the next paragraph that the alleged "author" was in fact the fiancé of the dentist's daughter: he had merely been using "a spare moment to check certain details of the dowry" (19).

Nomenclature

In his "unpublished interview", purportedly recorded in 1972 but printed only in *Strong Opinions,* the author touches upon his own relationship with protagonists appearing in his penultimate novel. Dissociating himself from "Mr. R", the fictive novelist in whom "flippan[t]" reviewers of *Transparent Things* had seen an authorial self-portrait, he draws attention instead to "the infuriatingly smiling Adam von Librikov" (in Chapter Nineteen of the novel) – "an anagrammatic alias", says VN, "that any child

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65. Apropos of AM-baring in *Ada.* What are we to make of the fictive locale of "Mont Roux" (e.g. 551) where some of the decisive events in the novel take place? Is it legitimate to connect this locale with the actual Swiss town where the author himself is known to have written his novel?

can decode" (above ex. [2]). This leads us to another distinctive device of AM-baring in Nabokovian fiction: implantation into the fictive discourse of "anagrammatic", punning, or otherwise distorted variants of *the authorial name* occurring on the title page of the novel.

Such instances are more familiar to us from lyrical verse, where the speaker is often associated with the author almost as a matter of course. "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy will,/And 'Will' to boot, and 'Will' in over-plus", writes William Shakespeare in his Sonnet 135 (SHAKESPEARE 1609, 70). Similar conceits are well known in the work of other Anglo-American poets, from Donne's "And, having done that, Thou hast done" ("To Christ") to Frost's "The lurking frost in the earth beneath" ("Two Tramps in Mud-Time"). (I take the two latter examples from BROOKS 1939, 26–7, 112.)[66] Russian modernist literature presents us with a still more striking antecedent – an entire "anagrammatic" poem by Osip Mandel'shtam, where the poet's name is suggested through a complex of phonetic and alphabetic linkages (Poem No 303; the text is discussed in a paper by IVANOV 1972, 81–7).

The problem is of a different order, however, when the anagrammatic insertions are made part of a discourse uttered by a novelistic speaker (like Mr. R above), whose unawareness of the higher authorial level is hence elevated into a specific subject of the narrative. We should notice that novelists usually avoid nomenclatorial confusions between themselves and their heroes. Consequently, even the slightest correlation, concerning perhaps a single letter (as with "Joseph K" in Kafka's *The Trial* or "Levin" in Lev Tolstoj's novel),[67] has tended to send critics on a hunt for further parallels. This is a fact that is systematically capitalized on in VN's fiction. I shall tabulate the principal occurrences.

(i) *The "Darkbloom"/"Calmbrood"/"Kalambur" -Complex.* The fleeting appearances of Quilty's accomplice "Vivian Darkbloom" in the background of *Lolita* (cf. 6, 33, 216–17) are familiar to everybody today, their inclusion being initially motivated also by extra-literary considerations.[68] In the screenplay version of the novel it is even pointed out that "her name looks like an anagram" (*L* S, 146). Furthermore, Darkbloom figures as the author of the parodic "Notes to *Ada*" -section in *Ada* (*A* 1970, 463), and in an interview recorded in 1971 VN casually names her as one of his "ideal readers"

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66. VN has subjected this convention to a parodic treatment in *Pale Fire,* where he allows his fictive poet John Shade to indulge in similarly punning games (e.g. on l. 728: "just half a shade" [60]). The parody is even more obvious on ll. 425–6, when Shade's name is said to appear "just behind/(one oozy footstep) Frost" (48).

67. The latter coincidence is underlined by VN in his *Anna Karenina* lecture (*Lectures 2,* 216).

68. VN has indicated in "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" that at first he "was meek enough to stipulate that the book be brought out anonymously" (*L,* 303). Had this plan been realized, the inserted anagram would have functioned as a clue to the book's true authorship for future generations (those opening the novel "in the first years of 2000 A.D." [*L,* 291]). The clue itself was pointed out at least as early as 1959 (by ANON. 1959, 363), and since then critics have been on the lookout for analogous occurrences. APPEL (1970a, 325) includes a streamlined discussion. Related observations on the anagrammatic method appear in FIELD 1967, 73; STUART 1970, 92 and 1978, 111–12; GRAYSON 1977, 113n; BODENSTEIN 1977, 131; COUTURIER 1979, 58; JOHNSON 1979a, 407–8. I shall try to add a few observations of my own.

(*SO,* 192). In the Russian *Lolita* the name figures as "*Vivian Damor-Blok*" (*L* R, ii, 22, 202). A closer look at the canon will reveal that the same set of alphabets has been used in most cunning variations of cross-lingual play.

The anagrammatic device was already seen at work in the 1923 drama-fragment *Skital'cy,* presented as the first act of an obscure English play entitled *The Wanderers* (cf. the title page, 67): the text was said to have been rendered into Russian by one "Vlad. Sirin" and written by the eighteenth-century author "Vivian Calmbrood" (*Kalmbrud* in Cyrillic alphabet). "*Kalmbrud*" re-emerged after a period of eight years as the author of the 132-line excerpt from "The Night Journey" ("*Iz Kalmbrudovoj poemy 'Nochnoe puteshestvie'* ", first published in 1931 and reprinted in *Stikhi* 1979, cf. 238), and once more in one of Quilty's guest-book entries in the Russian *Lolita:* "*Dzhems Manor Morell, Kalambur, Anglija*" (*L* R, 231). (*Kalambur* is both an alphabetic variant of "*Kalmbrud*"/"Calmbrood" and – appropriately – 'pun' in Russian.)

"Mr. Vivian Badlook", the photographer whose shadow is glimpsed in *King, Queen, Knave* (153; not in *KQKn* R, cf. 150), represents another anagrammatic alias. It is suggested that his son, also "Vivian", is later observed by Dreyer riding his tricycle along Berlin streets (172–6).[69] Still another variant – "Blavdak Vinomori" (239, 253) – turns up among the names of Martha's dance partners at Pomerania Bay. In *Ada,* it is "Baron Klim Avidov" (223) who presents Van and Ada with the game of *alfavit* (i.e. "Scrabble", cf. 222–9), hence covertly prodding also the reader to decode the alphabetic puzzles. "Adam von Librikov" in *Transparent Things* (cf. above) is the final representative in the series.

(ii) "*Sirin*". In a like manner, the author's Russian *nom de plume* (well known to his American readers at least since its appearance in *Speak, Memory* [287–8]) may be punningly implanted into his later English fiction. In *Look at the Harlequins!* Vadim adopts "V. Irisin" as one of his own pseudonyms, allegedly choosing it after the villa where he met his first wife Iris ("Villa Iris" [5 *passim*]). In *Ada,* Antiterran critics discern in Van Veen's juvenile novel the influence of "an obscene ancient Arab, expounder of anagrammatic dreams, Ben Sirine" (344). *The Gift* features a minor émigré novelist named "Shirin" (297, 299); it is not without significance that in the final chapter Fyodor attends a writers' meeting in which both Shirin and "Vladimirov" (above ex. [42]) are present. Additionally, the Russian pseudonym occurs in *Pnin* (117); "Torpid Smoke" (*RB,* 31); the long narrative poem "To Prince S.M. Kachurin" (*PP,* 139); and under a less easily detectable guise in "Fame", where the speaker evokes:

> [45] [. . .] an idol, a wizard
> bird-headed, emerald gloved, dressed in tights
> made of bright blue scales [. . .]
> (ll. 45–7; *PP,* 105)

– "*sirin*" again, for in ancient Slavic mythology the name denoted a bird-shaped deity (cf. Greek *seirēn*).[70]

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69. The same name functions as an authorial sign in *Look at the Harlequins!*, where Vadim queries the identity of "Poor Vivian" (249). In *Speak, Memory* the author jokingly names "Vivian Bloodmark" as his "philosophical friend" (218).

70. For VN's own note on his Russian pseudonym cf. *Poems and Problems* (113). One notices that as early as in the 1923 poem "*Kak blednaja zarja, moj stikh negromok*" the speaker refers to his "*ptich'e prozvishche* [*bird-like pseudonym]" (*Stikhi* 1979, 113).

(iii) "*Nabokov*". The authorial surname allows for various types of play with AM.[71] Apart from having one protagonist in "Vasiliy Shishkov" address another as "Gospodin Nabokov" (*TD,* 208; not in VSh R; cf. *VF,* 206), the author may also bring members of the Nabokov ancestry to take part in the fictive history. Fyodor's "*The Life of Chernyshevski*" makes reference to the part played by "the Minister of Justice, Nabokov" (*G,* 277) in Chernyshevski's transfer from one place of exile to another (i.e. VN's grandfather Dmitri Nikolaevich Nabokov [1827–1904]; he is described in *Speak, Memory* [56–9]).[72] In *Pale Fire,* the legend of Zembla interconnects with the fact, again recorded elsewhere by the author, that it was VN's "great-grandfather Nikolay Aleksandrovich Nabokov" who "participated [. . .] in an expedition to map Nova Zembla (of all places) where 'Nabokov's River' is named after [him]" (*SM,* 52). Even the name "Shishkov" (besides "Vasiliy Shishkov" it occurs in "A Bad Day" and "Orache") proves to have its roots in the Nabokov family history, for this was the maiden name of the author's great-grandmother (*SM,* 54; *EO* 3, 169–73).

In *King, Queen, Knave,* Dreyer catches glimpses of several small German towns while speeding towards Martha's sickbed: "Nauesack, Wusterbeck, Pritzburg, Nebukow" (264). In *Ada,* a talisman is awarded to Ada, "carved in Kiev, five centuries ago, in the days of Timur and Nabok" (268);[73] she also mentions a butterfly, the "fantastically rare vanessian, *Nymphalis danaus* Nab.", described by "Professor Nabonidus of Babylon College, Nebraska" (158). In *Look at the Harlequins!*, "McNab" is one of the pseudonyms given to Vadim by Ivor (cf. 7);[74] this is abbreviated to "Mr. N." (15) in a psychiatric article dealing with his case; and after his bout with madness Vadim must himself fight off a number of false identities: "Nebesnyy", "Nabedrin", "Nablidze", "Nabarro", "Naborcroft" (249).[75]

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71. So do of course the author's first name and patronymic. In *Look at the Harlequins!* Vadim goes to some length to explain that "Vadim Vadimych" is in fact a colloquial form of "Vladimir Vladimirovich" (249; for comments on the same point cf. VN's Tolstoj-lecture in *Lectures 2,* 204). "Vadim Vadimich" occurs also in *Pnin* (105, 128); "Vadim" in *Glory* (66); and "Vladimirov" in *The Gift* (above ex. [42]). The initial "V" is used in " 'That in Aleppo Once . . .' " (*ND,* 113); in *Pale Fire* ("V. Botkin"); or in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* where "V" (first ment. on 67) is made to combine with the "N" of "Knight" to produce the authorial signature. Cf. also the title of "The *Van* Sisters". In *Ada,* the double initials of "Van Veen" again incorporate those of the author behind him. There is an obvious irony involved e.g. in Van Veen's injunction to the reader to "read on; it is pure V.V." (170). Moreover, the latter example incorporates an allusion to the author's wife "Vera": "Greetings from V. and V.", VN wrote as early as in a letter dated August, 1944 (Letters, 139).

72. This is once more reminiscent of Pushkin: in the penultimate scene of *Boris Godunov* a parenthesis describes how "Pushkin comes, surrounded by the people" – a reference to the poet's sixteenth-century ancestor, but also a sly self-reference to the control he is exerting over the world of his own making. Fyodor quotes this occurrence in *The Gift* (244), but he never notices that similar operations are being performed behind his own back in the narrative.

73. VN has half-jokingly suggested in his memoir that one of the founders of the Nabokov-clan may have been the Tartar prince "Nabok Murza" (*SM,* 52; cf. also *SO,* 119).

74. In *Letters* ([November 24, 1942], 88) VN reports having himself been dubbed "McNab" by an American acquaintance.

75. The last alternative incorporates the original Russian title of the short story "Recruiting": "*Nabor*" (Rc R).

(iv) *Etymologies.* Finally, let it be noted that AM may be bared in the author's Russian fiction through curiously "etymological" punning. Near the close of "*Muzyka*" the hero is greeted by "*nekto Bok*" (Mus R; *Sogl,* 183),[76] and the choice of this name would appear to suggest also the origin of the authorial surname. Conceivably, "Nabokov" harks back to such common phrases as '*bok*' ('side' [Russ.]) or '*na-boku*' ('on one side' [Russ.]), and this enables the author to insert reminders of his controlling presence into virtually any passage in his Russian texts. In an excerpt from *Otchajanie* Hermann observes "*malinovoj siren'ju v nabokoj vaze*" (*Ds* R, 32; *Ds,* 42: "phallic tulips in a leaning vase"), reproducing not only an approximation of the familiar name (*v nabokoj*), but also the corresponding Russian pseudonym (*siren'ju*). Consider also:

> [46] [. . .] *glukho skazal starichek i sklonil golovu na-bok.*
> (*KQKn* R, 53; *KQKn,* 53)
>
> [47] *Zhivjom bok-o-bok, mozhno skazat'.*
> (Leon R; *VF,* 61; Leon; *RB,* 14)
>
> [48] [. . .] *a otec ego, Il'ja Fal'ter, byl vsego lish' starshim povarom u Menara, povar vash Il'ja na boku.*
> (UT R; *VF,* 278; UT; *RB,* 153)

Such instances render any further tabulations pointless, for surely this is a development to the absurd of the whole anagrammatic method. Not only fictive protagonists may be made to act as stand-ins for their maker, it is being suggested here, but in the final analysis *any word* uttered in fictive discourse can draw attention to the authorial dimension beyond the range of the utterer.

Fatidic Dates

Commenting on Pushkin's well-documented attempts to forecast the date of his own death, VN observes that the poet's "concern with the fatidic was almost morbid" (*EO* 2, 128). In *Pnin* he has his hero expound on the same subject (67–8), and in still another context he states his personal interest in the matter: "In common with Pushkin, I am fascinated by fatidic dates" (*SO,* 75). When this concern is expressed in the author's fiction through a selection of coincidental anniversaries, dates and years, covertly linking one fictive event with another and hence suggesting a shared authorship behind the otherwise autonomous constructs, it is seen to acquire a specifically AM-baring force.

The method can be best illustrated, I think, with VN's manipulation of his own birth date as an authorial marker. In his Foreword to *Speak, Memory* (13–14) the author arrives, *via* somewhat involved comparisons between the Julian Calendar (observed in Russia at the time of his birth) and the modern Gregorian one, at "April 23, 1899", which most Western sources recognize as the official date of his birth.[77] As VN was

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76. In "Music" this reads: "a man named Boke" (*TD,* 68). In "Lance", "Emery Lancelot Boke" is said to be one of N-agent's "remote descendant[s]" (*ND,* 163). "Lance Boke" reappears as one of Victor Wind's schoolmates in *Pnin* (101); *Look at the Harlequins!* features "Professor Noteboke", the well-known Gogol'-scholar (125); and *Pale Fire* makes reference to "Sudarg of Bokay", the Zemblan mirror-maker (111). We recall that "*The Artist's Studio* by Van Bock" was the summary-phrase offered by VN himself to describe his a-realistic methods (above ex. [38]).

77. On the other hand, the entry in *Bol'shaja sovetskaja enciklopedija* gives the date as "12(24).4. 1899" (ANON 1974, 187). The authenticity of the date is of no significance to our present problem.

fond of pointing out, this anniversary coincides with the (hypothetical) birthdate of William Shakespeare (*SM,* 13–14; *Lectures 3,* 8, 25) and the year is precisely a century removed from the birth year of Pushkin. (*EO:* "There, a hundred years later, I, too, was walked by a tutor" [2, 41].) In Commentary to *The Song of Igor's Campaign* he thrice records the fact (if it is one) that it was on "Tuesday, April 23, 1185" (*IC,* 1, 86, 93) that Igor set out on his campaign.

More interestingly from our present standpoint, however, the "fatidic" date is also threaded throughout the author's fiction. In *Ada,* which itself came out two weeks prior to VN's seventieth birthday, Van Veen calls April "[his] favorite month" (15): it was in that month that he was conceived by Demon (*ibid*); Aqua and Demon marry on "Shakespeare's birthday" (26; cf. also 4); and subsequently "April, 23" will be the date when Andrey Vinelander dies, leaving Ada free to join her brother (551). In *Look at the Harlequins!,* "April 23, 1930" marks the death of Vadim's first wife and his own decision to abandon English as a domestic tongue (124). In *Glory,* Martin's twenty-first birthday is said to occur "in mid-April 1923" (131; the year is not given in *Gl* R, cf. 152), and in *Mary* the rooms in Frau Dorn's *pension* are numbered with leaves torn from a calendar: "the first six days of April, 1923" (5; again the year is added, cf. *M* R, 12).

A running list of analogous instances:

(i) *January 1.* This is Lolita's birthday (*L,* 65). Sebastian Knight was born one day earlier, "thirty-first of December, 1899" (*SK,* 5).[78] It is also the shared birthdate of Vadim's daughter Bel and his fourth wife (*LH!,* 226). In *Ada,* the casually-dropped references to Van Veen's birth "fifty-two years and 195 days ago" (535) and the fact that his ride to Mont Roux takes place on "July 14, 1922" (551) allow us to infer that he, too, shares the common date. (VN points out in his *Anna Karenina* -lecture that in order to follow the time-scheme in the novel Tolstoj's reader must be prepared to make "computation[s]" [*Lectures 2,* 190]. The same applies to his own readers.)

(ii) *April 1.* The first of April might be chosen as another Nabokovian anniversary, motivated as it is by the consistent emphasis on "deception" in the author's writing. The date is confirmed as Gogol's birthday in *Nikolai Gogol* (150). In *Despair,* Hermann expresses a desire to "mak[e] an April fool of someone" (34), and his final diary-entry is dated "April 1st" (221). It is on this same date that the action commences in *The Gift* (11) and an "April Fool" joke is played on Fyodor (37). In *Mary,* Alfyorov's room is numbered with the calendar-leaf "April 1" (5). And, in "The Aurelian", Pilgram's dream is almost fulfilled on –

> [49] [. . .] a certain first of April, of all dates.
> (*ND,* 83; in the Russian text the date is kept secret: "*v seryj i syroj aprel'skij den'* " [Aur R; *Sogl,* 199])

(iii) *February 15.* This date, Pnin's birthday as it turns out, is allusively played with throughout a large part of the narrative in *Pnin* (21, 67, 75, 186–7 *passim*), seemingly to taunt the "Careless Reader" (75), but also as a hidden marker of AM. One is allowed

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78. The birth year again coincides with that of VN himself. There are also other "fatidic years" in the canon. "1888" is the year when the actress Iris Acht dies in *Pale Fire* (122; cf. also 294), and the same year Van Veen revisits Ardis Hall for the second time in the universe of *Ada* (187).

to infer that it is on this date, in 1955, that the action in the novel concludes (186). In the author's next novel, Kinbote is introduced to Shade one day – plus four years – later, on "February 16", 1959 (*PF,* 20). In *Look at the Harlequins!,* Vadim at one point actually defines "the moment of writing" as "February 15, 1974" (168).

(iv) *July 4/5.* Lolita abandons Humbert on the fourth of July (hence gaining her "independence"; cf. *L,* 239 *passim*), and the next day Humbert embarks on his quest (240–1). This again coincides with *Pale Fire,* where Shade's and, presumably, Kinbote's shared birthday falls on July 5 (13, 157–63). Shade completes Canto One of his poem on July 4, 1959 (13), and on July 5 Gradus is said to have departed on his mission (74). In *Pnin,* the date is assigned to Pnin's first heart attack: it occurred on "July 5, 1920" (21).

(v) *July 15.* This is an important date within the novelistic universe of *King, Queen, Knave:* it is on July 15 that "*King, Queen, Knave*", the film within the novel, is destined to open (216, 261); on the same date the action in the novel ends, and Martha dies.[79] As above, the date is given additional intertextual force within the canon: Gradus arrives at the Côte d'Azur airport "in the early afternoon of July 15, 1959" (*PF,* 250), and still in Index to *Pale Fire* Kinbote is seen waiting "vainly for S[hade] on July 15th" (312).

(vii) *July 21.* Ada's birth-date (*A,* 6) – and the date of Van Veen's final visit to a floramor (358) – receives an additional motivation from the hero's death in a previous novel. It was on "July 21, 1959" (*PF,* 13) that Shade's life came to an end, his poem was finished, and the text was turned over to his maker.

The System of *Audition Colorée*

Beyond such exact data – names, dates, or facial resemblances – there exists a terrain of more vague linkages between AM and the author's individual fictions. Accordingly, the analyst will be on more or less uncertain ground here, for it is just too easy to lapse into listing *any* parallel passages in the author's writing that happen to come to hand. Nonetheless, one feels that certain recurrent concerns, certain key-motifs and allusions, require further attention in our narratological analysis: I shall be claiming that apart from reflecting VN's real-life concerns, these instances are also made to serve an intrinsically narrative function, often reminding us through the simple fact of recurrence of the authorial control behind each particular fiction.

This is most certainly the case with VN's emphasis on synesthetic effects, color, and "colored hearing" both in and out of his fiction. Codified in Chapter Two of *Speak, Memory* (34–6), where color-values are assigned by the author to English sounds and letters, and again in *Drugie berega* (*SM* R, 25–8), which gives corresponding values for the Cyrillic alphabet, this peculiar concern also has an interest in itself.[80] On the other

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79. It is appropriate, then, that this is also the date of Lermontov's death. The date (July 15, 1841) is cited on the front leaf of VN's English translation of *A Hero of Our Time* (*HOT,* unpagin.).

80. Not least in disclosing an unmistakable affinity with related speculations on the subject by VN's Symbolist predecessors. Comprehensive discussions of Nabokovian synesthesia against its literary-historical background have been provided by JOHNSON 1974 and 1979a. There is

hand, if our emphasis is transferred from separate effects to the comprehensive system, the subject becomes interesting from our present standpoint.

The author's *audition colorée* functions as an AM-baring tool when given color-and-sound analogies are inserted into the discourse uttered by fictive protagonists, who themselves remain obtuse with regard to the origins of their synesthetic aptitude. The most clear-cut instances of this occur in *The Gift* (76–7) and *Dar* (*G* R, 85–6), where Fyodor unwittingly details the precise "auditive hues" for the Russian alphabet promoted by the author in *Drugie berega.* I shall list some additional examples.

(i) *f/t.* A quite straightforward instance of the system in action occurs in *Glory,* with the otherwise unimaginative Martin exclaiming:

> [50] Tenerife – God, what a lovely, emerald word!
> (83)

Though Martin can hardly know it, both *f* and *t* are specifically classified as belonging to "the green group" in *Speak, Memory* (35; cf. also *SM* R [27] and *Gl* R: "[. . .] *kakoe divno zelenoe slovo!*" [98]).

(ii) *y/l.* Krug's seemingly facetious explanation to Maximov in *Bend Sinister:*

> [51] [. . .] the word 'loyalty' phonetically and visually reminded him of a golden fork lying in the sun on a smooth spread of pale yellow silk.
> (76)

– again receives its justification from the author's own reference in *Speak, Memory* to "bright-golden *y*" (35), or from the fact that *l* is defined by him as "one of the most limpid and luminous letters" (*SO,* 25). In his Foreword to *Glory* the author makes a rather similar reference to the word "glory", which he visualizes as "branching in the bronze sun" (xii–xiii).

(iii) *v.* The author of the farewell-letter in Sebastian Knight's "*Lost Property*" – a speaker existing at least three fictive removes away from the real author – again turns out to be an adherent of the Nabokovian system:

> [52] Life with you was lovely – and when I say lovely, I mean doves and lilies, and that soft pink 'v' in the middle.
> (*SK,* 105)

The association of *l* with "whiteness" (i.e. "lilies") can be understood also on more general grounds (cf. "An Evening of Russian Poetry": "[. . .] black pools of sound with 'l''s for water lilies" [*PP,* 160]), but the "pink" *v* is surely derived from VN's own proposal that this letter may be best expressed with " 'Rose Quartz' in Maertz and

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some unavoidable overlapping between the findings in these two papers and my own remarks. Additional observations on the question occur in CROFTS 1965, 24; BODENSTEIN 1977, 192–5, 226–9. VN acknowledges – in a somewhat grudging manner – his "debt" to such trend-setting literary synesthetes as Rimbaud, Proust, or Belyj in *The Gift,* where he has Fyodor say that he could "[write] not a mere sonnet but a fat opus" (76) on the topic. The allusion is to Rimbaud's famed "*Voyelles*", and the "opus" in question was later brought out by the author himself when he wrote *Speak, Memory.* Synesthetic effects in Proust are approvingly noted in *Lectures I,* 235–6.

Paul's Dictionary of Color" (*SM,* 35). Compare also his definition in *Strong Opinions:* "*v* is a kind of pale, transparent pink" (17).[81]

(iv) *z.* In prefacing his English version of "The Thunderstorm", VN describes the original Russian title "*Groza*" as "a grand little word with that blue zigzag in the middle" (*DS,* 118). This activates still another network of linkages within the canon. "Thundercloud *z*" is expressly mentioned by the author in *Speak, Memory* (34; SM R has "*blestjashche-sirenev*[*oe*] *Z*" [27]). In Commentary to *The Song of Igor's Campaign* he appends a lengthy gloss to the mention of "blue lightnings" in the medieval bard's text (*IC,* 103–4). And the synesthetic effect is repeatedly underlined in "The Thunderstorm" itself through the choice of phonetically suggestive wording: "dazzling" (120); "blaze" (121); "muzzle" (122); "hazel" (*ibid*); "breeze" (123; my emphases).

In addition, in *Invitation to a Beheading* it is Cincinnatus who takes notice of "the storm's blue zigzag" (123). In *The Gift,* Fyodor notes in his discourse on Russian rhymes that "*Glaza* (eyes) [shine] blue in the company of [. . .] *groza* (thunderstorm)" (148). The correspondence between letter and color occurs once more, in a comically prosaic form, in *Look at the Harlequins!,* as here a purchase is made of "a beautiful *blue* suitcase with a zipper" (227; my emphases).

The Code of Games

Just as the Nabokovian concern with color, the author's aptitude for certain *games of skill* is made public in diverse contexts outside his fiction. We have already noted the frequent parallels he has drawn between problem composition in chess and the art of literary composition itself (2.3.3.). In a similar manner, VN has repeatedly taken up his background as a semi-professional tennis player (*SM,* 40–2, 191, 205, 258 *passim*); as we know, in the 1930's a portion of his subsistence actually came from lessons given in "English and tennis" (*ibid,* 283; *SO,* 127). Also his insistence on playing the position of a goalkeeper in soccer is fully documented. VN preferred this position not only during his schooldays at the Tenishev Lyceum (*SM,* 185), but also while studying at Cambridge (*ibid,* 267), and still in his émigré years at Berlin (cf. the colloquy with Sedykh [Interview 1932, 2]). In his later pronouncements the author sometimes returned to the subject of goalkeeping in order to underline his life-long aspirations towards "individualism" (*SO,* 59–60; see also his recollections in FIELD 1977, 127).

How are these pervading interests manifested in VN's narrative fiction?

It is a trivial observation, of course, that the authorial expertise (e.g. in tennis) to some extent determines the choice of the subject-matter in his novels – although the frequency of game-motifs as such is not devoid of interest as a stylistic feature.[82] "The

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81. In *Drugie berega* the author has referred to: "*molodaja luna cveta Ju* [*a young moon of the color *Ju*]" hanging "*v akvarel'nom nebe cveta V* [*in an aquarelle sky of the color *V*]" (*SM* R, 124). In *Speak, Memory* the passage appears in a less suggestive form: "A moist young moon hung above the mist" (134).

82. ROWE includes in his book a whole chapter on "Sports and Games" in Nabokovian fiction (1971a, 141–59), but he dreadfully misconstrues the issue by interpreting the game-motifs as "sexual symbolism". VN has vehemently rejected this reading in "Rowe's Symbols" (*SO,* 304–7). More to the point, BODENSTEIN (1977, 373–96) comments on chess and other games as a specific source for Nabokovian imagery. A detailed scrutiny of game-elements as components of the plot in VN's novels is provided in a paper by SAMPSON 1982.

first description of tennis [in Russian literature] is found in *Anna Karenin,* Tolstoy's novel, and is related to year 1875", asserts the hero in *Pnin* (105–6), apropos of nothing in particular, if it is not to comment on the proliferation of tennis-related episodes in the art of his own creator.[83] "*Loun-tennis* [. . .]/*smenjaet bujstvennyj futbol*" (Stanza XXXII; 238), remarked the speaker in "*Universitetskaja poema*" (1927), and since him[84] a number of Nabokovian protagonists have brushed against this particular facet of AM. In Humbert Humbert's narrative, tennis is again developed into a controlling metaphor for "art" itself (*L,* 225–9 *passim*). In addition, the motif is associated with Dreyer in *King, Queen, Knave,* who is coached by the Russian émigré "Count Zubov" (188; 185–90 *passim*); Martin in *Glory* (46–7, 54, 99, 129 *passim*); Van Veen in *Ada* (255, 474, 571 *passim*); or Hugh Person in *Transparent Things* (cf. the description of his "cling drive" on 27–8, 56–8). So does the authorial soccer-motif recur under various guises: Martin's goalkeeping in *Glory* (109–14) or Krug's related school-memories in *Bend Sinister* (57–8); Van Veen's accomplishments as a "College Blue" (*A,* 184, 255); Mr. Silbermann's discourse on a "robinsonnada" (a special kick; cf. *SK,* 118); or Pnin's misguided efforts to buy a "football" from the Waindell sports store (*P,* 99).[85]

In many of these cases, such references are fully justified in terms of the given narrative, and there is no real need for the reader to search for their motivation in AM. "I suppose I am especially susceptible to the magic of games", writes Humbert Humbert (*L,* 228), spelling out a purely intra-narrative justification for the frequency of tennis- and chess-related terminology in his discourse. Related motivations are built into the discourses uttered by a number of other speakers in the author's novels (e.g. Van Veen and Ada appear to excel in *all* of their creator's favorite games, even the game of "Scrabble" [*A,* 222–8] reportedly taken up by VN in his later years [*SO,* 110].)

It is only when such motivation is lacking, or when its existence is flatly *contradicted* in the narrative, that it becomes necessary to take recourse to the notion of "author" behind the fictive voice. This is what happens in a very typical instance from *Look at the Harlequins!*. Here Vadim, after having repeatedly underlined that he is "a complete non-athlete" (122) with no taste for "a metronomic tennis ball twanging to and fro" (116), nonetheless makes use of an unmistakably Nabokovian tennis-smile to describe his own art of literary portrayal:

> [53] All this is easily described and this also goes for the regular striation of bright bloom along the outside of forearm and leg, which, in fact, smacks of self-plagiarism [. . .]. The general type and bone structure of her pubescent radiance cannot be treated [. . .] with a crack player's brio and chalk-biting serve.
> (169)

The reference is to Vadim's Lolita-like daughter Bel, and the whole passage turns out to be modelled as an ironic comment on his efforts to achieve a stylistic voice of his own.

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83. The literary-historical point is reiterated in the author's own voice in his *Anna Karenina* lecture (*Lectures 2,* 234). Cf. also the lecture on *Don Quixote,* where VN amusingly uses tennis-notation in listing the knight's "victories and defeats" (*Lectures 3,* 94–110).

84. Still earlier, the 1923 collection *Gornyj put'* included a poem with the English title "Lawn Tennis" (141).

85. I.e. the American "soccer" ball. Another of VN's early Russian poems was in fact entitled "Football" (*Stikhi* 1979, 24–5).

The only one guilty of "self-plagiarism" in ex. [53], it is humorously suggested, is *the author,* who by recycling his former imagery (Lolita's tennis game [cf. *L,* 225–9] is placing his distinctive stamp on an excerpt that he has nominally assigned to another.

Not in an entirely dissimilar fashion, when Kinbote suggests in *Pale Fire* that Shade should entitle his poem "*Solus Rex*" (296), he may be aware of the chess-connotations belonging to the term (as it is indicated elsewhere, the term denotes "a king-in-the-corner waiter" [118–19]), but he cannot know that the same term has already been used by his maker as the title of a former Russian text ("Solus rex", the 1940 story). Neither can Vadim know this in *Look at the Harlequins!,* when he evokes a tryst with his American mistress:

> [54] A freshness of flowers, clusters and clouds of flowers, reminded me of some other time, some other casement. I made out part of the Adamsons' glossy black car beyond the garden gate. Both? She alone? *Solus rex*?
> (160)

Still elsewhere, chess-related terminology may be used by the author in a curiously self-referential and emblematic fashion. In "An Affair of Honor", at the precise moment when Anton Petrovich begins getting enmeshed in the parodic plot, he observes before him: "[a] chessboard on which a higgledy-piggledy game was in progress" (*RB,* 88). In *Mary,* we are told that immediately prior to Ganin's becoming aware of the main mystery in the narrative (the identity of Alfyorov's wife) he "had been glumly trying to decipher a chess problem drawn on one of the pieces of paper lying around the bed" (24). In an even more flagrant instance from *King, Queen, Knave,* Dreyer unwittingly reflects on his own status in the author-controlled design of the plot when he advises the two chess players at the Pomerania Bay resort: "He stopped for a moment and gaily warned White that Black's knight was planning to attack White's king and queen with a forked check" (241). In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* it is again at the specific point that he is about to launch on a decisive search for Knight's mistress that V comes upon the emblematic "black knight" (133) in the hand of her former husband. (For other instances cf. also PE; *RB,* 244; *P,* 48–9, 132–3, 136; *IB,* 137, 143.)

It is entirely appropriate, in view of all these self-referential strategies, that in his struggle to free himself of the preordained pattern of the fiction Vadim considers giving up writing and "tak[ing] up chess seriously" (this is one of the key-passages in *Look at the Harlequins!:* cf. above ex. [41]). The suggestion running through all such passages would seem to be that it is only by coming as close as possible to the position of the controlling "author" when reading a Nabokovian narrative (and even more when *living inside* one), that either the reader or the hero may hope to cope satisfactorily with the game-like design of the narrative itself.[86]

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86. The chessboard-motif occurs in an altogether explicit form in *Look at the Harlequins!,* when Vadim conceives of a nocturnal cityscape in terms of chess-like patterns:

> The house was dark except for three windows: two adjacent rectangles of light in the middle of the upper-floor row, d8 and e8, Continental notation (where the letter denotes the file and the number the rank of a chess square) and another light just below at e7.
> (91)

For identical descriptions of the narrative universe as a chess-like "game" cf. also *ibid,* 182; *Ada,* 434; *The Gift,* 313.

In the famous lepidopteral Chapter Six of *Speak, Memory* the author draws attention to an analogy between his interest in natural history and his concern with artistic creation (for him, both are "a form of magic, [. . .] a game of intricate enchantment and deception" [125]). Nonetheless, it ought to be noted that this is an aspect of his career that has significance also independently of its *literary* interest.[87] After his emigration to USA, VN worked for six years as a Research Fellow at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, and during this period (1942–8) he published widely on problems involved in entomological classification. Still today, entirely irrespective of his fame as a best-selling novelist, VN holds a distinct place in the annals of American entomology as an authority on certain species of diurnal butterflies. (He has himself sketched his entomological career in *Speak, Memory,* 125–6. Cf. also Introduction to *BS,* vii; *Letters* [August 9, 1942], 69. For additional data see APPEL 1970a, 327–9; FIELD 1977, 269–71; LEVY 1984, 1–2, 6–8, 32–8.)

"The very technical details can be found in Nabokov's latest article", as KLOTS writes in his *A Field Guide to the Butterflies of North America* (1951, 164), guiding the hobbyist to a series of papers by VN on the genus "*Lycaeides*". These include the nearly book-length "Notes on the Morphology of the Genus *Lycaeides* (*Lycaenidae,* Lepidoptera)" (1944), "Notes on Neotropical *Plebejinae* (*Lycaenidae,* Lepidoptera)" (1945), plus more than a dozen briefer papers, notes, and reviews on the subject. (FIELD's 1973 Bibliography [148–50] lists twenty-two entomology-connected publications printed in the author's lifetime.) VN has also discovered entirely new subspecies of butterflies, and "*Lycaeides argyrognomon sublivens* Nabokov", described by him in "The Female of *Lycaeides Sublivens* Nab." (1952),[88] has been named after him.

In addition to these public records, the author's life-long passion for butterflies is documented in his interview-statements (*SO,* 3, 10, 39–40 *passim*); in prefatory pieces to his novels (e.g. Foreword to *KQKn,* v; Foreword to *Df,* 7; "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*", 302); or in a number of lyrical pieces. Some of VN's earliest Russian poems were devoted to the subject of lepidoptera – e.g. "*Nochnye babochki*" (*Gr,* 132–3) or "*Babochka* (*Vanessa antiopa*)" (*Stikhi* 1979, 60) – and it appears that his hobby was no secret to the Russian émigré public. (It is explicitly mentioned in the presentation by STRUVE 1934, 436. Cf. also NOVIK 1931, 517.)

Does this data have any pertinence in a narratological analysis?[89]

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87. Despite Ivor Black's argument, ostensibly aimed at the lepidopterist Kanner in *Look at the Harlequins!*, that "all that butterfly business is only a publicity stunt" (36). A similarly double-bottomed protestation is sounded by the hero in *Pnin:* "I have always had the impression that his entomology was merely a pose" (128). Pnin is talking about someone called "Vladimir Vladimirovich" (*ibid*).

88. This is the title used in *Strong Opinions* (315–18) and the bibliography by FIELD (1973, 149). Upon the original appearance of the article in *The Lepidopterists' News* the name of the describer was still omitted.

89. Since BUTLER, in her 1960 examination of the biographic backgrounds of *Lolita,* presented the thesis that "in *Lolita* Nabokov has transposed his own passion for butterflies into his hero's passion for nymphets" (60), critics have been constantly on the lookout for "lepidopteral metaphors" in the author's fiction. This line of interpretation is taken furthest by APPEL who has traced the pattern of entomological references hidden inside the narrative in *Lolita* (1967c, 110–12, 119; 1970a, 327–9, 336–7 *passim*). Nature imagery, entomo-

VN has himself drawn attention to the scarcity of lepidopteral references in the work of previous writers (in *Speak, Memory* he observes that his scrutiny of classical Russian poetry has rendered only two examples "of genuinely sensuous quality" [128–9]). Entomological motifs therefore emerge as a truly distinctive feature in the author's own writing, where precisely described butterflies keep fluttering from one narrative to another.[90] After learning of his father's death Martin in *Glory* observes how "a zebra-striped swallowtail glided past, its tails extended and crossed" (9), and other occurrences of the butterfly-motif will be accompanying him throughout many of his subsequent adventures (e.g. on 21, 48, 89, 158, 161). In *Laughter in the Dark,* during the fateful trip taken by Albinus and his two companions, the radiator of his car becomes "crammed with dead bees, and dragonflies, and meadow-browns" (129). At the end of Sebastian Knight's boyhood romance "[a] Camberwell Beauty skims past and settles on the kerf, fanning its velvety wings" (*SK,* 130), duplicating, as it were, the occurrence of the same insect at the close of the "Tamara"-episode in the author's own memoir (*SM:* "[. . .] a Camberwell Beauty, exactly as old as our romance, sunning its bruised black wings [. . .]" [239]). And in *Pnin,* in the midst of his walk with a Russian friend at The Pines, Pnin perceives:

> [55] A score of small butterflies, all of one kind, [. . .] settled on a damp patch of sand, their wings erect and closed, showing their pale undersides with dark dots and tiny orange-rimmed peacock spots along the hindwing margins; one of Pnin's shed rubbers disturbed some of them and, revealing the celestial hue of their upper surface, they fluttered around like blue snowflakes before settling again.
> (128)

"Celestially-hued" butterflies have also been mentioned in the Russian version of the author's memoir, where VN specifically refers to "*moj goluboj samuelis*" (*SM* R, 128; omitted from *SM,* cf. 138–9), and in *Letters* the reference is made even more explicit. Commenting on *Pnin* in a letter dated February 18, 1957, the author takes up ex. [55], adding:

> [56] I actually described and named that particular Lycaenid (*Lycaeides samuelis* Nabokov, type locality Karner, near Albany, N.Y.).
> (307)

A fictive hero observing an insect named after his own creator – this is a most typically Nabokovian narrative effect (unlikely to be repeated in the work of any other

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logical and botanical allusions, and other related references in *Ada* are subjected to an expert scrutiny in MASON 1974. The chapter entitled "Butterflies" in BODENSTEIN (1977, 355–73) includes a list of lepidopteral tropes collected from every corner of Nabokovian writing. My sole interest in the matter here concerns its narrative ramifications.

90. Another aspect of this emphasis is seen in VN's habit of chastising the English translators of classical texts for misapplying entomological terminology. Pushkin's alliteratively churring "beetle" in Seven: XV: l. 2 of *Evgenij Onegin* ("*zhuk zhuzhzhal*") is amusingly glossed by VN as "a cockchafer, a scarabaeoid beetle, the European maybug, either of the two species of *Melontha*" (*EO* 3, 81), while earlier translators are lampooned for "transform[ing] a coleopterous insect into an orthopterous one" (82). "Not bumblebees are visiting the lilacs [near Emma's grave] but bright green beetles" (*Lectures 1,* 258–9), VN says in his *Madame Bovary* -lecture, again correcting the former English renderings of Flaubert's novel. Cf. also the somewhat dubious thesis from VN's Kafka-lecture (*ibid,* 258–9) that Gregor Samsa of "The Metamorphosis" could have *flown* out of his room had his creator only known his correct species (a winged beetle, not a cockroach).

modern novelist). With regard to our more narrowly defined question of AM, however, I would propose still an additional distinction between such instances when they are motivated in terms of a given narrative, and lepidopteral references that remain unmotivated without our taking recourse to the notion of "author". It is only in the latter cases that AM in our sense becomes truly activated.

Quite a few of VN's fictive spokesmen are experts in lepidoptera in their own right, which dispels any further need to justify the entomological data occurring in their discourse. This applies to N-agents at least in *Bend Sinister, Pnin,* and "*Terra Incognita*". John Shade reveals familiarity with the field in *Pale Fire,* and in *Ada* it is Ada who keeps correcting the inaccuracies committed by Van Veen in his chronicle (e.g. on 158). Similarly, the entomological observations occurring in the discourse may derive from the mind of the perceiving hero, as in "The Aurelian" or in *The Gift,* where Fyodor – the practicing entomologist-hobbyist – is at one point seen identifying ten different species of butterflies within the space of a single paragraph (130–1). In *The Eye,* the following simile is drawn from quite unmistakably Nabokovian sources, but there is nothing in the narrative to indicate that its fictive utterer *couldn't* be capable of such meditations:

> [57] I could already count three versions of Smurov, while the original remained unknown. This occurs in scientific classification. Long ago, Linnaeus described a common species of butterfly, adding the laconic note '*in pratis Westmanniae*'. Time passes, and in the laudable pursuit of accuracy, new investigators name the various southern and Alpine races of this common species, so that soon there is not a spot left in Europe where one finds the nominal race and not a local subspecies. Where is the type, the model, the original? Then, at last, a grave entomologist discusses in a detailed paper the whole complex of named races and accepts as the representative of the typical one the almost 200-year-old, faded Scandinavian specimen collected by Linnaeus; and this identification sets everything right.[91]
> (60)

The problem is again of a different order when N-agent's ability to observe nature in a reliable manner is *contradicted* in the text, while accurate information is still transmitted by way of his discourse. (This is a specifically Nabokovian use of "unmotivated" data in fiction: one related instance was already seen in connection with the tennis-metaphor in *Look at the Harlequins!;* ex. [53].)

The latter device occurs in a somewhat muted form in *Pale Fire,* when Kinbote obtusely misconstrues a mention of an "atlantis" in Shade's poem as a reference to "another flower" (169). The author has provided an opportunity for his reader to be more astute than Kinbote by having Shade observe in another passage that "The Red Admirable, later degraded to The Red Admiral" is the obsolete name for the "Vanessa"

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91. Cf. the author's own discourse on literary taxonomy in Commentary to *Eugene Onegin:*

> As happens in zoological nomenclature when a string of obsolete, synonymous, or misapplied names keeps following the correct designation of a creature throughout the years, and not only cannot be shaken off or ignored, or obliterated within brackets, but actually grows on with time, so in literary history the vague terms 'classicism', 'sentimentalism', 'romanticism', 'réalism' and the like struggle on and on, from textbook to textbook.
> (*EO* 3, 32)

Similarly in *Nikolai Gogol* (56, 152), the entomological vehicle is twice applied to Gogol's literary art. In *Speak, Memory* (12–13), it is applied to VN's method of translating his Russian texts. Cf. also Interview 1977, 123.

butterfly (172). And as anyone with a smattering of entomological knowledge (or one having access to a handbook, unlike Kinbote) will be aware, the scientific term for The Red Admiral is "*Vanessa atalanta* Linnaeus" (KLOTS 1951, 105) – the atlantis/*atalanta* -motif provides an important verbal association that keeps recurring throughout the multiple layers of fiction in the novel.[92]

The game is taken further in *Lolita,* where Humbert Humbert's narration is at places laden with covert entomological allusions, even while his overtly stated awareness of the field amounts to notice of "nameless insects" (165) observed during the cross-continent journey.[93] Quite similarly in *Look at the Harlequins!*, Vadim is made to expressly deny any awareness of the subject:

> [58] I know nothing about butterflies, and indeed do not care for the fluffier night-flying ones, and would hate any of them to touch me: even the prettiest gives me a nasty shiver like some floating spider web or that bathroom pest on the Riviera, the silver louse [. . .][94]
> (34)

In consequence, several elements in the narrative must be read as highlighting authorial rather than N-agent's concerns: the quite precise description of "Morpho" butterflies (67; also on 156); the corrective provided for the entomological "error" in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" ("I did not wake up one Central European morning as a great scarab with more legs than any beetle can have [. . .]" [120]; cf. *Lectures 1,* 258–9); or the sarcasm directed at the popular misconception "that houseflies, for instance, *grow*" (35; emphasis in the text). (Compare: "Weekenders come to inspect my captures and ask me whether butterflies grow" [*Letters,* 107].) Consider also the following entomological simile, applied by Vadim to describe his fondness for handwritten manuscripts. Identical comparisons have been used by VN all through the canon (e.g. above ex. [57]):

> [59] It was now the publisher who bore the brunt of having my hand transformed directly into printed characters; and I know he disliked the procedure as a well-bred entomologist may find revolting an irregular insect's skipping some generally accepted stage of metamorphosis.
> (234–5)

The whole game with AM is laid bare in Vadim's narrative when he rehearses his first trip to the western states (VN's regular collecting grounds throughout his American

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92. It is Kinbote again who points out that mentions of both "*Vanessa*" and "*Atalanta*" figure in one of Swift's poems ("Cadenius and Vanessa"; cf. 172 plus ll. 270–1 of Shade's text). The latter term is repeated in the jumbled syllables of Hazel Shade's "poltergeist" message: "[. . .] ata lane [. . .]" (188). In addition, Kinbote claims that the Vanessa butterfly is called in Zemblan "'*harvalda*' (the heraldic one)" (172), which interconnects with the cluster of "Gerald Emerald"/"Herald's Hall" -correlations elsewhere in the novel (I have sorted these out in 3.2.3.). In his memoir VN draws attention to a related species of butterflies – "The Large Emerald" – that he hunted in his boyhood Russia (*SM,* 132).

93. As such allusions are given a thorough – perhaps even an overly thorough – scrutiny in studies by BUTLER (1960) and APPEL (1967c; 1970a) they need not be taken up in more detail here. I have surveyed this aspect of *Lolita* in TAMMI 1977, 158–71.

94. He instantly dramatizes his ineptitude by misnaming one of his maker's favorite insects: the graceful silverfish (i.e. *Lepisma saccharina;* for its description cf. KLOTS 1951, 13, 33). In "Cloud, Castle, Lake" it is observed that "there is a certain grace in the motions of silky silverfish" (*ND,* 93), and in Humbert Humbert's discourse one of Lolita's nymphet friends is given "silverfish eyelashes" (*L,* 186).

period ["On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"; *L,* 302]). Arriving in Arizona, Vadim claims, he experienced –

> [60] [. . .] the dream sensation of having come empty-handed – without what? A gun? A wand? This I dared not probe lest I wound the raw fell under my thin identity.
> (156)

Problems of Translation

The publication of VN's "Problems of Translation" in 1955 marked the beginning of a long series of texts in which his opinions anent "literalism" and "paraphrastic" (i.e. free) translation were expounded. As the notion is summarized by the author here:

> [61] The term 'free translation' smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the 'spirit' – not the textual sense – that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.
> (296)

Since then, VN's concern with accuracy of translation has surely become one of the best-known features associated with his public *persona.* The initial paper was followed by "*Zametki perevodchika*" (I–II [1957]); the important "Translator's Foreword" to the author's 1958 English rendering of *A Hero of Our Time* (*HOT,* esp. xii–xvi); and the 1959 article "The Servile Path", which constitutes a veritable manifesto of the literalist credo. In 1963 there appeared "Pounding the Clavichord", a demolition of Walter Arndt's rhymed translation of Pushkin's *Evgenij Onegin,* where the forthcoming publication of VN's own unrhymed version was announced (*SO,* 231–40; cf. also Postscript 1964). With the printing of *Eugene Onegin,* and with the subsequent stir created by Edmund Wilson's review-article (WILSON 1965a; a revised version in 1972); VN's reply (Letter 1965: the first draft of "Reply to My Critics" [*SO,* 241–67]); plus the flurry of counter-replies (by WILSON 1965b and 1966; LOWELL 1966; joined by several additional hands) and counter-counter replies by VN (Letters 1966a and b), the rift between "literalist" and "paraphrastic" practices took its place as one of the quirks of recent cultural history. (Indeed, VN himself underlined the importance of the controversy for allowing him to transform the privately-held position into a public fact: "[. . .] all I wish is merely to *put on record* my utter disgust with the general attitude, amoral and Philistine, towards literalism" ["Reply to My Critics"; *SO,* 243; my emphasis].)

There is no need to reiterate the more particular phases of this controversy (they are described meticulously enough in C. BROWN 1967; FIELD 1967, 272–90; SCOTT 1970; as well as in some of the more substantial reviews written on the revised 1975 version of *Eugene Onegin* [E.J. BROWN 1977; SHAW 1977]). Nor is it necessary to discuss the pros and cons of the literalist theory as such (on this account see GRAYSON 1977, 13–22) – although one might notice that VN's own adherence to the theory is hardly consistent: outside *Eugene Onegin* the author has always striven towards a maximally literary – rather than "literal" – rendering of the translated text.[95] What

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95. As much is acknowledged by the author himself in "*Zametki perevodchika II*" (37) and in his reply to Arndt (Postscript 1964, 16). In the latter piece he explains that this is specifically why he won't allow his previous translations to be reissued, hence in one sense excluding them from the definitive canon. Such translations would include e.g. the 1923 Russian

interests us in this connection is above all the use of the author's public stand as a narrative element in his post-*Eugene Onegin* fiction. I shall conclude my survey with remarks on this particular component of Nabokovian AM.

Initially, of course, the "motif of translation" surfaced in VN's writing long before *Eugene Onegin.* The first Russian rendering of "*Vivian Kalmbrud*" came out as early as 1923 (i.e. *Skital'cy;* on authorial anagrams cf. above). Similarly the 1930 poem "*Ul'daborg*" purports to be *"a translation from Zoorlandian" (*Stikhi* 1979, 235), hence looking forward to the more sustained play with invented languages in works like "*Solus Rex*", *Bend Sinister,* or *Pale Fire.* There are episodes in which particular problems of translation are taken up also in *Glory* (56–7), *The Gift* (121, 257), or *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (183), but it is only with the growth of the author's translation-related activities during his labors on Pushkin that the motif starts gaining distinctly AM-baring force.

In *Lolita,* we see Humbert Humbert dividing his time between nymphet watching and extensive "research in palatial libraries" (34). It is his purpose to bring out a contrastive study of French and English poetry (18), which provides a rather apt counterpart for VN's related work on *his* comparative opus, begun while *Lolita* was still in progress.[96] In a similar manner, the authorial concerns are manifested in *Pnin,* where satiric notice is taken of "Mrs. Garnett impersonating somebody" (64) on the bookshelf of a Waindell tenement (i.e. Constance Garnett, the well-known translator of Russian classics, who is lampooned in *Nikolai Gogol* as "totally lacking verbal talent" [38]).[97] Pnin himself is observed "translating with brave literality" (68) a line from Pushkin to his classroom, which results, alas, in his rendering "*okhladnyj prakh*"[98] as "refridgerated ashes" (VN parodying his own method). Such self-parodic manoeuvres are taken further in *Pale Fire,* where Kinbote cites a number of rather absurdly "literal" translations of Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* into Zemblan (80 and *passim*), Marvell and Donne into French (240–2), or phrases of Zemblan into English (e.g. on 205) – indeed, the comprehensive design of *Pale Fire* (Poem + Commentary) surely constitutes a parodic takeoff of VN's own *Eugene Onegin,* and it shows us where a single-minded search for the "authentic" meaning of a text may finally lead. In *Ada,* satiric barbs at the common practices of translators are extended throughout the very texture of the narrative (from

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rendering of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland;* the numerous selections from Shakespeare, Rupert Brooke, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and others that the author prepared for the Russian émigré press throughout the 1920's and 1930's; or the English versions of Pushkin, Fet, and Tjutchev in *Three Russian Poets* (1944). In his article "The Art of Translation", published in 1941, VN could still write that "neither learning nor diligence [of the translator] can replace imagination and style" (161; cf. also *Lectures 2,* 319) – this pronouncement is diametrically opposed to his later lampoons of "the dainty mimic" (*EO* 1, x).

96. Traces of this preoccupation with contrastive stylistics is in evidence everywhere in Humbert's narration. Ludicrously, even Quilty is made to share the all-encompassing concern. Only minutes away from his death, close to the end of the Pavor Manor execution-scene, he remarks: "A Frenchman once translated my *Proud Flesh* as *La Fierté de la Chair.* Absurd" (288). The term has been used in its properly anatomic sense by VN in *Lectures 3* where he talks of "the proud flesh of some of [the] passages [in *Don Quixote*]" (10).

97. Garnett is further discredited on the basis of her renderings of Tolstoj in VN's *Anna Karenina* lecture. Cf. *Lectures 2,* 147, 166, 168n, and *passim.*

98. I.e. l. 24 of "*Brozhu li ja vdol' ulic shumnykh*" (PUSHKIN 1829, 136): *"cool ashes".

the first paragraph on; cf. also 11–12, 63–5, 92, 127, 245, 247, 259, 282, 377, 577, 585). And in *Look at the Harlequins!*, Vadim's afore-cited reflections on "[. . .] spend[ing] a dozen years as an obscure scholar making a Russian translation of *Paradise Lost*" (ex. [41]) again spiral back to the author's decade-long labor on *Eugene Onegin* (with fateful preciseness: in the epigraph to his translation VN cites Pushkin's comment on the prospects of Frenchifying Milton's work into *Le paradis perdu* [*EO* 1, 1]).[99]

Apart from such interweaving of fiction and the author's own concerns, VN's later novels display examples of a still more specific mode of AM-baring: instances, that is, in which the controversy surrounding *Eugene Onegin* itself is used as a basis for allusive play. This is a recurrent feature in *Ada,* where bits and pieces of the author's disputed translation are quietly incorporated into the fictive discourse.[100] It is evidently beyond Van Veen's capacity to know that all evocations of *Onegin* in his chronicle come to him *via* a work written by his own creator. "Your uncle has most honest standards [. . .]" (317), he says to the philosopher Rattner's nephew, unwittingly modifying the opening line of the poem (*EO* 1, 95; VN has discussed at length the variant ways of rendering this line in his Commentary [2, 29–31]). "*Tak ti zhenat* (so you are married)? Didn't know it. How long?" (454): Van's retort to Greg Erminin harks directly back to the scene between Onegin and Tat'jana's husband in the concluding chapter of Pushkin's poem (*EO* 1, 290). To Lucette's query as to whether he hates her, Van replies with a duplicate of Onegin's assertion to Tat'jana: "I love you with a brother's love and maybe still more tenderly" (481; *EO* 1, 182) – though here the argument takes on considerably more sinister undertones, as Van of course *is* Lucette's half-brother. Compare also Van's preface to one of Ada's verse-translations: "By chance preserved has been the poem. In fact, I have it. Here it is" (247) – and *Onegin,* where Lenski's verse is cited: "The verses chanced to be preserved; /I have them; here they are" (*EO* 1, 236).[101]

Secondly, single words and phrases from *Eugene Onegin* may be implanted into most unexpected places in the author's subsequent fiction. The obsolete "mollitude" is the noun chosen by VN to stand for Pushkin's *nega* (*EO* 1, cf. 2, 186, 337; in all, the word occurs in the translation some twelve times), and it is vigorously defended by VN in his reply to Edmund Wilson's critique ("Reply to My Critics" [*SO,* 255]; WILSON 1965a, 3). Therefore, one is instantly reminded of the authorial *persona* when the word crops up again in Van Veen's chronicle. Compare: "[. . .] nothing about them pre-announced the luxury and mollitude of my first Villa Venus" (373). Or: "[. . .] both were now sunk in mollitude" (473). In the English version of "*Solus Rex*" we observe a heroic

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99. What is more, Vadim's bookshelf at Quirn holds "Keats, Yeats, Coleridge, Blake, and four Russian poets" (*LH!*, 163) – only one step away from VN's *Three Russian Poets.* Even the references to "The Boyan Bookshop" (*LH!*, 88) or the " 'Boyan' publishing firm" (90) turn out to be linked with AM. As explained by VN in his notes to *The Song of Igor's Campaign,* "Boyan" is the mythical bard whom the speaker of the poem considers much superior to himself (*IC,* cf. ll. 10, 29 *passim* and VN's note on 84). The allusion again lays bare Vadim's own inferiority before the master fiction-maker above him.

100. Many of the Pushkin-allusions in *Ada* were identified in a paper by JOHNSON 1971. Cf. also remarks by ROWE (1971a, 22) and the annotations in PROFFER 1974b. The connection of these allusions to the larger phenomenon of AM-baring has not been previously noted.

101. A modified version of the same line is appropriated by the fictive chronicler in *Pnin:* "The letter has by chance remained among my papers. Here it is [. . .]" (182).

scholar giving up "the mollitude of his book-lined study" (*RB,* 210) in order to save his country, and in *Glory* Martin sees a dog "lying in complete mollitude on her side" (59; remarkably, there is no mention of *nega* in *Gl* R, cf. 71).

The case of bared AM is quite striking also when it comes to a neologism like "racemosa". This is a purely Nabokovian coinage, introduced into the English language by VN to replace the standard term for the Russian *cheremukha* (i.e. "bird cherry"; cf. "The Servile Path", 104–5; *EO* 3, 9–13). Being a part of the author's personal idiolect the term tends to evoke AM in whichever context it happens to be used. E.g. in "The Execution" ("[. . .] and full of racemosas the ravine!" [*PP,* 47]); "The Circle" (*RB,* 256); or *Mary* (58, 75).

Even the occurrence of one "Dr. Gerschizhevsky" in the Antiterran annals of literature (*A,* 225) derives from the controversy surrounding *Eugene Onegin:* Dmitrij Chizhevskij was the famous Slavist whose former exegesis of Pushkin's text is consistently lampooned throughout VN's Commentary (as a "worthless compilation" [*EO* 1, 60], a "careless compilation" [2, 80], and so forth); Alexander Gerschenkron was the Harvard-based scholar who wrote the most detailed critique of *Eugene Onegin* after its first printing (GERSCHENKRON 1966). In his Foreword to the revised edition VN expressly singles out "Mr. Alexandr Gershenkron [. . .] for rectifying, on Mr. D. Chizhevski's behalf" a minor lapse in the earlier version (*EO* 1, xiv).

6.2.3. Auto-Allusion as an AM-Baring Device

From what was said in the above survey, the following conclusion can now be drawn: there exists a tremendous wealth of "autobiographic" materials in VN's fiction (ranging from physiognomic traits to facets of the author's cultural and professional background), but they are not activated as autonomous, extra-textual facts. Rather, these elements become active only *by way of linkages with the author's other texts,* other pieces of conclusive evidence where the Nabokovian concerns are documented. It is because of this allusive substructure underlying the author's canon that we are justified in regarding aspects of VN's public career as properly *literary facts* in his particular narratives.

The same rule holds true with a considerable vengeance for our last group of AM-baring strategies. Surely any novelist's *persona* is best characterized by his own novels, and this fact is made into a specific source of play in VN's fiction. Therefore, allusions to the author's other novels and stories in his work are also to be considered a distinctly narrative device. For in systematically evoking textual elements and motifs from the preceding canon (even separate words: *vide* "racemosa" or "mollitude" above), the author keeps foregrounding the place of a given narrative in his larger artistic plan. The suggestion becomes inbuilt in each of these texts that above their individual speakers, C-agents, and N-agents there still exists the controlling consciousness of an author, who by playing with his materials bares for us his *persona* even at the instant of turning it into a fiction.

I shall denote such practices as cases of *auto-allusion* in our studied corpus.[102] Varieties of the device are detailed in the following.

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102. Related instances from world literature have again received particular attention in Slavic scholarship, where they are known under various headings: *samopovtorenie* (i.e. "self-repetition"); *samozaimstvovanie* or *avtoreminiscenija* ("self-loan"); or *avtocitat* (which I translate here as "auto-allusion"). All these terms are used to indicate intertextual relation-

Obviously, not just any sort of duplicate item within the canon will come under consideration here. We are interested specifically in such cases in the author's narratives as shatter the illusion of "realism" by aid of references that can be explained only with the notion of AM. This is why we must still subdivide the auto-allusive strategies into some smaller compartments.[103]

One very tangible instance is provided for us in the first chapter of *Evgenij Onegin,* where Pushkin has his fictive spokesman overtly address "friends of Lyudmila and Ruslan". VN draws our attention to this example in *Eugene Onegin* (2, 36), and in his own translation we read:

> [62] Friends of Lyudmila and Ruslan!
> The hero of my novel,
> without preambles, forthwith,
> I'd like to have you meet:

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ships within the output of a single author. The first concept was used by EJKHENBAUM (1924b, 61–75), who devoted a separate chapter in his Lermontov-monograph to recurrent elements, motifs, and variant passages in the poet's diction – rather indiscriminately, it must be added, from the standpoint of our present problem which does not concern simple "repetition" (i.e. the existence of variants). Closer to our approach, LEVIN (1969 and 1972) applies the second pair of concepts to Mandel'shtam's poetic vocabulary. As Levin points out, in Mandel'shtam given words and images acquire quite specific – "specifically Mandel'shtamian" (*specificheski mandel'shtamovsk*[*ie*] [1969, 108; 1972, 5 *passim*]) – shades of meaning when related to occurrences of the same term elsewhere in the canon. Auto-allusions in Mandel'shtam's poetry are also treated by TARANOVSKY 1974, 158–68. *Avtocitat,* finally, comes from MINC (1974), who has investigated auto-allusion as a manifestation of Russian Symbolist and Modernist concerns: particularly writers like Blok or Belyj conceived of their total production as a single "text" that could be freely evoked in other corners of the canon. I propose that these comments are illuminative also when we study VN's narrative practice.

103. One would claim that it is precisely a reluctance to differentiate between mechanical repetition and activated "allusions" that has hampered previous treatments of the problem in Nabokov-scholarship. Many critics have commented on the overall tendency towards "repetitiveness" in VN's writing. E.g. PRITCHETT notes aptly in his review of *Look at the Harlequins!* that "half the pleasure in late Nabokov lies in the *déjà vu*" (1974, 3). Formerly C. BROWN had stated that VN "has been writing in book after book about the same thing" (1967, 200). Other related observations include the following: FIELD 1967, 97 *passim;* APPEL 1967b, 25–7 (plus a running commentary throughout 1970a); LEE 1964, 230–1 and 1976, 26–9 *passim;* WEILER 1976, 38–9; LUBIN 1970, 187–8; GRAYSON 1977, 25; COUTURIER 1978, 170–1 and 1979, 58–9. Auto-allusive instances in *Ada* – a veritable composite of intertextual relations – are elucidated in the final chapter of MASON 1974, 142–56; 181–2, 190–2. Cf. also APPEL 1970b, 185–6 and BADER 1972, 132. *Look at the Harlequins!* has ignited still larger listings: PROFFER 1974c; PATTESON 1976; HYDE 1977, 211–19; GRABES 1977, 106–31. Useful comments are also included in BODENSTEIN's (1977) chapter on "Transcendent Designs" (343–456), a tabulation of central metaphors, and in his list of recurring characters (283–5). I shall try to concentrate here on hitherto unnoticed instances, but my chief aim is to draw a distinction between relevant and non-relevant cases. VN has himself pointed out in his comments on Pushkin that "[the] pursuit of reminiscences may become a form of insanity on the scholiast's part" (*EO* 2, 32–3), and confronted with listings in the work of some recent Nabokovites one can easily see the author's point. I have previously commented on this problem in TAMMI 1980b, 1459.

Onegin, a good pal of mine,
was born upon the Neva's banks,
where maybe you were born,
or used to shine, my reader!
(One: II: ll. 5–12 [*EO* 1, 96])

This is obviously the most direct method of auto-allusion available to any author: implantation of actual titles from other parts of the canon into the fictive discourse in a given narrative.

Such mentions need not always be as obvious as ex. [62],[104] and it is in fact a rare case in VN's fiction that the title of a former work is evoked expressly *as a title* – although this too may happen. We recall that in "Torpid Smoke" (*RB,* 31) the hero's collection of his favorite books includes "Sirin's *Zashchita Luzhina* (*Luzhin's Defense*)" (which amounts, I take it, to an indirect version of the Pushkinian address: those of you who enjoyed *The Defense,* "the hero of my [present narrative]/[. . .] I'd like to have you meet"). A rather more common strategy involves insertion of Nabokovian titles into the discourse uttered by fictive N *without any indication of the original source.* The resultant irony encompasses not only the protagonists inside the narrative, but also those readers (say, modern American readers of "Torpid Smoke"), who are unfamiliar with the opus and hence miss important authorial clues.

In discussing such cases I shall be using the marking [→] to indicate an allusion to a previous *source text* incorporated into the subsequent *alluding text.* Unlike in our previous chapters, this will make necessary some rather cumbersome chronological considerations. It might be expected, namely, that the alluding text was always printed *after* its source. In quite a few instances it will turn out, however, that VN has added the allusive elements only to a later, revised edition of his work, in which case the chronology becomes upended: a nominally more "recent" novel or story may now emerge as the source text for a "previous" work. This is why it becomes possible to say that *The Defense* "alludes to" the story "Signs and Symbols" (*Df* → SS), even though the latter was published almost twenty years after the original, unrevised novel (cf. below ex. [67]). Similarly, a relationship like *LD* → *G* becomes possible (ex. [69]), for the revised edition of *Laughter in the Dark* (issued in 1961), unlike the original Russian text (1932–3), contains an allusion to elements first used in *The Gift* (1937–8). And while *Lolita* (first published in September, 1955) came out before the complete edition of *Pnin* (1957), Chapter Three of the latter text, containing elements taken up again in *Lolita* (ex. [71]), was printed separately as "Pnin's Day" in *The New Yorker* as early as April 23, 1955 (a fatidic date). Hence: *L* → *P.*

All relevant instances occurring in the canon will be summarized in a concluding table (*Table 3*).

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104. The allusion is to *Ruslan and Ljudmila,* of course, written by Pushkin some four years before Chapter One of *Onegin.* In his *Don Quixote* lecture VN draws attention to another example from the classical narrative: Cervantes's allusions to his previous writings within the framework of the novel (*Lectures 3,* 116). A more recent example would be provided by John Barth's novel *Letters* (1979), where the entire Barthian canon is imaginatively interwoven into the narrative – it may well be that this work was inspired by VN's auto-allusive techniques.

(i) *LH!* → (*A* → [*G* → <*Sobytie* → *LD*>]). In VN's 1938 drama *Sobytie* one of the protagonists draws attention to a cinema hit of the season:

> [63] [. . .] *akh, chudnaja fil'ma, akh 'Kamera Obskura' – luchaja fil'ma sezona* [. . .]
> [*Oh, what a wonderful film, this '*Kamera Obskura*' – the best film of the season]
> (Act I; 52)

This, as any member of the émigré audience was apt to notice, evokes the original title of *Laughter in the Dark: Kamera obskura.* The novel came out in 1932–3 and it was reissued by the author in English (under the title *Camera Obscura*) the same year as the play. The title crops up again in *The Gift* when Koncheyev advises Fyodor:

> [64] 'All you're concerned with is patrolling your body and trailing the sun. But thought likes curtains and the camera obscura.
> (320; *G* R: "[. . .] *mysl' ljubit zanavesku, kameru obskuru*" [379])

In *Ada,* Van Veen is given for his eighth birthday a book entitled "Alice in the *Camera Obscura*", which suggests both *Laughter in the Dark* and VN's own 1923 Russian translation of Carroll's novel (evoked elsewhere in *Ada* as "*Palace in Wonderland*" [53], "Ada in Wonderland" [129], and "Ada's adventures in Adaland" [568]). The entire series of allusions is re-evoked in *Look at the Harlequins!*, as Vadim is here mistaken by an admirer for "the author of *Camera Obscura*" (92). Vadim himself later issues his fourth Russian novel – "*Camera Lucida*" – as "Slaughter in the Sun" (cf. "Other Books by the Narrator" [unpagin.]). The latter reference telescopes the definitive English title of *Laughter in the Dark,* the concluding slaughter scene in the novel (*LD,* 187), as well as the author's own punning mention in his memoir of the "camera-lucida needs of literary composition" (*SM,* 92).

(ii) *LH!* → (*PF* → [*P* → SR]). A somewhat similar intertextual complex is created by VN around the title of his unfinished Russian novel (the second chapter of which was printed as "Solus rex" in 1940). We have noticed previously that Kinbote appropriates the term in *Pale Fire* with express reference to the Nabokovian code of "games":

> [65] He had the amusing feeling of his being the only black piece in what a composer of chess problems might term a king-in-the-corner waiter of the *solus rex* type.
> (118–19)

Kinbote's further suggestion that Shade entitle his poem "*Solus Rex*" (296) recalls not only the initial Russian text, but also *Pnin,* where it is Pnin who keeps having a recurrent dream of –

> [66] [. . .] that crucial flight episode when the King alone – *solus rex* [. . .] – paced a beach on the Bohemian sea.
> (86)

In *Look at the Harlequins!*, Vadim once more uses the chess-analogy in close connection with AM (cited above in ex. [54]).

(iii) *Df* → SS. This is a case of an "earlier" text containing an allusion to a "later" one. The revised version of *The Defense* (printed in 1964) alludes to the title of "Signs and Symbols" (1948) by way of a reference to Luzhin's mental chess games:

> [67] [. . .] Luzhin gradually ceased to reconstruct actually on the board and contented himself with perceiving their melody mentally through the sequence of symbols and signs.
> (44; cf. *Df* R: "[. . .] *ugadyval ikh garmoniju po cheredovavshimsja znakam*" [44])

The allusion is not a random one, for it aptly enhances a thematic linkage between the two narratives: in either, the insane protagonist is given premonitions of his own fictive status through textual signs belonging to the "game" played beyond his control.[105] The intertextual connection is still underlined through a mention in "Signs and Symbols" of the hero's cousin, "now a famous chess player" (*ND,* 56).

(iv) CCL → *IB.* Another thematically motivated connection: being obstructed by a hostile collective from pursuing his individualistic ways the very Cincinnatus-like hero of "Cloud, Castle Lake" cries out:

> [68] Oh, but this is nothing less than an invitation to a beheading.
> (*ND,* 97)

(v) *A* → (*PF* → *L*). Shade's "Pale Fire" carries a reference to "a year of Tempests: Hurricane/Lolita swept from Florida to Maine" (ll. 679–80; *PF,* 58). The year is specified in Kinbote's gloss as "1958" (243), which was of course the year when the first American printing of *Lolita* came out. In *Ada,* the title is taken up under two guises. For her 1884 picnic Ada dons her first "lolita" (cf. 77); a similarly named frock is later worn by a courtesan encountered by Van Veen (393), and the original picnic-episode ends with Ada sitting on Van's lap (86–7; echoes of the sofa-scene in *Lolita* [58–61]). Previously Demon has mentioned his "aunt's ranch near Lolita, Texas" (16), and Vivian Darkbloom explains in her "Notes to *Ada*" that the name of the town has been changed "after the appearance of the notorious novel" (*A* 1970, 464). Moreover, Vadim in *Look at the Harlequins!* visits "Lolita Lodge" (156) in Texas, which adds still another node to the series: *LH!* → (*A* → [*PF* → *L*]).

(vi) *A* → (*IB*+*L*). Besides (v) above, there exist numerous other linkages between *Ada* and the author's most notorious novel. One of the bestselling books at Antiterra is "*The Gitanilla*" (on which cf. below exs. [83]–[84]). It is accompanied by the luridly-entitled "*Invitation to a Climax*" (459), which suggests both *Invitation to a Beheading* (the first in the series of VN's translated novels to come out after the success attained by *Lolita*) and the various puns on "climax" within the text of *Lolita* itself (e.g. "Lake Climax" [105]). In his Foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading* VN actually pokes fun at those "evil-minded" readers who wish to see in the early Russian novel some specific analogies with *Lolita* (cf. 7–8).[106]

(vii) *LH!* → *M.* VN's last novel is in its entirety based on devices of auto-allusion. Depicting the aspirations of his fictive novelist towards an autonomous voice of his own,

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105. For *The Defense* cf. again 2.3.3. I have discussed this aspect of "Signs and Symbols" in TAMMI 1983b, 128–33.

106. Still other games with Nabokovian titles from *Ada:*

A → *PF.* The picture of "Pale Fire with Tom Cox Up" (477) above Cordula's bed recapitulates *Pale Fire* as such, as well as the baseball-pun in Shade's poem (ll. 97–8; 36). The new connotations need not be explained here, I think.

A → SF. Lucette, taking after Nina in "Spring in Fialta", spends a "spring in Fialta and a torrid May on Minotaor" (477); later Van will take his British mistress to Fialta (573), and Violet Knox will be dubbed "Fialochka" (576) by Ada.

A → VnS. In another connection Van overhears someone mentioning "one of the Vane sisters" (521), which he takes to be a garbled reference to his own name. He has not read the story by his maker with the corresponding title.

the author is at the same time suggesting that Vadim cannot but emulate the sources provided by his creator.[107] This effect is typically brought about when several Nabokovian titles are combined to form new ones, which are then assigned to Vadim. So, for example, "*Tamara*" (1925), his first novel, evokes not merely *Mary* (published in 1926), and not simply *Speak, Memory* (which contains a chapter on "Tamara" [229–51]), but also other facets of VN's literary career. To Vadim's chagrin, his novel is confused by one reader with "*Princess Mary*" (94), which rather deftly crosses the Englished title of *Mary* with Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time.* The latter work was translated into English by VN in 1958; its fifth chapter carries the title "Princess Mary"; and also the actual novel figures in the world of *Look at the Harlequins!*, where its title is garbled into "Hero of Our Era" (94).

(viii) *LH!* → (*Gl+G*). In a similar manner, "The Dare" (1950), which is said to be Vadim's last Russian novel, combines the original titles of *The Gift* (i.e. *Dar*) and *Glory* (*Podvig:* not "glory", but a "daring" deed in literal translation). The Russian title of Vadim's work is given as "*Podarok Otchizne*" ("Gift to the Fatherland" [*LH!*, 99]), which would appear to derive straight from one of Fyodor's poems in *The Gift:* "*Blagodarju tebja otchizna*" (*G* R, 66; cf. *G:* "Thank you, my land" [60]).

Moreover, we are told that the hero in Vadim's book is writing a scholarly work "on a dare" (*LH!*, 100), and later he accomplishes a final feat "by walking through a perilous forest into Soviet territory" (*ibid*) – which again recapitulates Martin's feat in the concluding chapter of *Glory.* Even Vadim's own escape from the U.S.S.R. along "a fairy-tale path winding through a great forest" (*LH!*, 9; cf. also 235) derives from *Glory,* where the winding path figures as the *Leitmotiv* of the entire narrative (4, 20, 156, 177, 205). As for the work within the work in Vadim's book – an embedded "biography of Fyodor Dostoevski" (*LH!*, 100) – it of course duplicates the Chernyshevski-section in *The Gift* (203–85). To his dismay, Vadim hears someone referring to "biographies of 'Chernolyubov and Dobroshevski" (101) in his work: a mix-up of Dostoevskij, Chernyshevskij, and Dobrolyubov (who likewise figures in *The Gift;* cf. 254).

Migration of C-Agents

VN began experimenting with the device of transferring fictive C-agents from one text to another from the very start of his novel-writing career. This is not wholly comparable to the technique of "*retour de personnages*" applied by many writers in novelistic cycles (Balzac in *La Comédie Humaine,* Joyce in his Dublin-narratives, or Faulkner in the "Yoknapatawpha"-series). For even while there are certain historical milieus that may be regarded as specifically "Nabokovian" – the émigré Berlin of the 1920's, Upstate New York of the 1940's and 1950's – the narrated histories in VN's novels do not otherwise overlap on the grandly Balzacian or Faulknerian scale. Rather, we should say that the unexpected appearance of one protagonist or another from a former novel

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107. The same suggestion is well summarized in Vadim's literary efforts after the death of his first wife: all he manages to produce is "a dozen short stories" (*LH!*, 74). His creator's four definitive collections of stories each contain a "Nabokov's dozen". There are twelve titles in the list of "Other Books by the Narrator" in *Look at the Harlequins!*, and the novel itself constitutes the thirteenth – even figures are against Vadim.

(e.g. from *Mary, The Defense,* or *Glory*) in the autonomous world of a later one (e.g. *The Gift:* see below ex. [70]) serves as a quite tangible rupture in this illusion of autonomy, instantly reminding us of the larger authorial plan behind the canon.

When in *Look at the Harlequins!*, for instance, it transpires that a lady named "Nina Lecerf" lives next door to Ivor Black at Carnavaux in 1922 (14), this does not necessarily mean to say that these C-agents inhabit "the same" fictive world as Sebastian Knight (who will court Nina some seven years later [cf. *SK,* 138, 140 *passim*]), for what is underlined is precisely the fictive quality of all novelistic worlds. As Nina's former husband asserts in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:* "You may find her in any [. . .] novel" (137).[108]

The following examples are included to further illustrate the matter.

(i) *Df* → *M.* The series of inter-novel migrations begins with the unostentateous inclusion of "the Alfyorov couple" (*Df,* 101) among the guests attending a *soirée* arranged by Luzhin's in-laws. In *Mary,* Alfyorov was left waiting for Mary's arrival from the U.S.S.R., and in *The Defense* it is indicated that the reunion actually did take place – in the space between, as it were, the author's first and third novels.

(ii) *Df* → MCh. A still earlier occurrence: *The Defense* also carries a reference to "a distant relative [of Mme Luzhina] who had been acquainted with a certain Luzhin, a St. Petersburg landowner" (88). In "A Matter of Chance" (published in 1924) the hero was indeed named "Aleksey Lvovich Luzhin" (*DS,* 143). The connection is underscored through a chess-simile attached to the latter's planned suicide: "He calculated every little detail, as if he were composing a chess problem" (*ibid,* 151).

(iii) *LD* → *KQKn.* An instance resembling (i): investigating the chaos on his desk after the breakup with Elisabeth, Albinus's consciousness registers, among other trifles: "An invitation for lunch from the Dreyers" (*LD,* 56). That the Dreyer couple from *King, Queen, Knave* re-emerges in the later novel is consistent with the internal time schemes of either text (both of them depict events taking place in the 1920's)[109] and also thematically motivated: it is indicated that the same attachment to petty bourgeois values that is satirized in *King, Queen, Knave* is again chosen as the target in *Laughter in the Dark.*

(iv) *LD* → *G.* In the revised English version of *Laughter in the Dark* Margot is seen amusing herself by ringing up ten times in succession the phone number of "Messrs Traum, Baum & Käsebier" (108), which turns out to be the same firm ("Traum, Baum and Käsebier" [182]) that employs Zina in *The Gift.* This is again an instance of a nominally "earlier" novel containing an allusion to a "later" text. In *Kamera obskura,* the firm is not named, as here Margot's precursor Magda is seen harassing an unnamed "busy man":

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108. This is why the occurrence of the Leshino schoolmaster "Bychkov" from *The Gift* (334) in "The Circle" (*RB,* 255) is not so interesting from the present standpoint. The two texts clearly refer to *the same* set of events, even if the narrative perspective has been altered. VN himself defines the latter narrative as a "small satellite" of the former (*RB,* 254), belonging to a cycle depicting a shared world.

109. In *Kamera obskura* the temporal locus of the history is specified as "*priblizitel'no v 1925 godu*" (*LD* R, 5). The reference is missing from *Laughter in the Dark.*

[69] [*Magda*] *desjat' raz podrjad zvonila po odnomu i tomu zhe nomeru, dovodja do izstuplenija zanjatogo cheloveka.*
(*LD* R, 114; "*Zanjatoj chelovek*" was the initial title of another early story: "A Busy Man")

(v) $G \rightarrow (Gl + [Df \rightarrow M])$. *The Gift* was the author's last Russian novel, and here the list of former members in the "Committee of the Society of Russian Writers in Germany" evolves into a small compendium of writer-protagonists from VN's earlier fiction:

[70] There was a time when all the people who went on the Committee of our Union were highly respectable, like Podtyagin, Ivan Luzhin, Zilanov, but some died and others are in Paris.
(301)

Zilanov, a political writer and journalist, appears in *Glory* (first mentioned on 52), and it is also noted that he has plans of starting a Russian newspaper in Paris (71). Ivan Luzhin is of course Luzhin Sr. from *The Defense* (his dealings with the "Union of Émigré Writers" are described on 59–65). Podtyagin lives in the same *pension* with Ganin in *Mary* (5). In *The Defense,* moreover, Mme Luzhina recalls Alfyorov's claim that "an old poet had once died in his arms" (179), which would seem to provide a belated proof that despite his efforts Podtyagin never reached Paris.

(vi) $P \rightarrow LD$. Such intertextual migrations become multiplied in the author's English fiction. "Dorianna Karenina", the curiously named film actress from *Laughter in the Dark* (80), resurfaces in *Pnin,* after a thirty-year interval, when we are told that Dr. Hagen's daughter had spent the summer of 1954 in Europe, "touring Bavaria and Switzerland with a very gracious old lady, Dorianna Karen, famous movie star of the twenties" (159).

(vii) $L \rightarrow P$. "McCrystal, Vivian" (*L,* 52) occurs among the list of Lolita's classmates at Ramsdale, and her mother – "Mrs. McCrystal" (78) – is mentioned among those neighbors with whom Charlotte was on intimate terms in 1947. In *Pnin,* Pnin is observed taking lodgings in her house:

[71] From old Mrs. McCrystal, in whose white frame house he had spent a mediocre winter (1949–50), Pnin purchased for three dollars a faded, once Turkish rug.
(69)

She has grown "old" in less than three years.

(viii) $PF \rightarrow P$. A series of intertextual links is constructed between these two consecutively published novels (cf. also below ex. [78]). Pnin himself appears five times in the course of Kinbote's narrative in *Pale Fire.* On his quest for the Zemblan monarch from the Wordsmith library Gradus bursts upon:

[72] [. . .] a bald-headed suntanned professor in a Hawaiian shirt [sitting] at a round table reading with an ironic expression on his face a Russian book.
(282)

The professor is elsewhere identified as "the head of the bloated Russian Department, Prof. Pnin" (155), and at one point Gradus is even mistaken for "Professor Pnin's new assistant" (283; cf. also 229, 268). Also the painter Lang who has painted the mural gracing the Waindell Faculty Club in *Pnin* (72) reappears in *Pale Fire,* where he allegedly

produces a portrait of Sybil Shade ("Lang made your portrait" [l. 682; 58]). Kinbote expresses some doubts as to the existence of the painter (246) – rightfully, for he in fact belongs to another fictive world.[110]

(ix) *A* → *PF*. In *Ada* it is indicated that C-agents may in effect be transferred from one fictive "universe" to another.

> [73] 'Space is a swarming in the eyes, and Time a singing in the ears', says John Shade, a modern poet, as quoted by an invented philosopher ('Martin Gardiner') in *The Ambidextrous Universe*, page 165.
> (542)

The lines cited by Van Veen in his Antiterran chronicle duplicate ll. 215–16 of "Pale Fire" (minus the capitalization of "Time" [*PF*, 40]). It is also said that Shade's work is in the process of being translated into Russian and French by Ada (*A*, 577), and a sample of the Russian version is given (585–6). As for "Gardiner", he is invented, but his name suggests Martin Gardner, who is indeed the real-life author of *The Ambidextrous Universe* (cf. GARDNER [1964, 144 and 152] where the lines from Shade are cited.) As VN has written in his study of Gogol': "We did not expect that, among the whirling masks, one mask would turn out to be a real face [. . .]" (*NG*, 141).

Transference of Names

It may be trifling to debate whether in given cases it is the protagonist himself who is transferred from one fiction to another, or whether it is only his *name* that keeps recurring. Nonetheless, in a number of instances certain distinctively "Nabokovian" appellations are clearly used in foregrounding the shared AM behind individual narratives.

When a protagonist named "Diana Vane" finds her way into a short story written by Vadim's wife in *Look at the Harlequins!* (62), this does not mean that she "is" one of the heroines from VN's own "The Vane Sisters", but probably no reader schooled in the author's auto-allusive methods will fail to notice the repetition. Similarly, there occurs a person named "Falter" both in Sineusov's narrative in "*Ultima Thule*" (*RB*, 149 ff.) and in the list of Lolita's schoolmates in *Lolita* (52). The secretary of the Russian department at Vadim's Quirn – "Miss Myrna Soloway", whose name is said to derive from "Soloveychik" (*LH!*, 150) – may be no relation of the "Soloveychiks" figuring in "Signs and Symbols" (*ND*, 54), but the nomenclatorial coincidence is still a fact within the opus. The following is a list of such cases.

(i) *P* → (Ln+*Df*). A case in point occurs in *Pnin*, where two of Victor Wind's 1954 classmates are introduced as "Tony Brade, Jr." and "Lance Boke" (101). "Emery Lancelot Boke" – nicknamed "Lance" – is of course the hero of "Lance" (cf. *ND*, 163), a story purportedly set in the distant future.[111] In *The Defense*, "Tony" is the derogatory nickname given to Luzhin by his classmates around 1910 (23, 56): the name derives from "*Tony's Adventures*", a book within a book written by Luzhin's father (*ibid*).

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110. "Lang" is also mentioned in *Speak, Memory* among the Russian illustrators of a work on lepidoptera that was studied by VN as a boy (122). "I do not know if [this] is relevant or not" (*PF*, 93), as Kinbote would say.

111. We also remember that "a man named Boke" greets the hero – another Victor – at the end of "Music" (*TD*, 68), set in the Berlin of 1930's. *P* → (Ln → Mus).

(ii) *P* → *LD*. Similarly, when the young man who causes Pnin, in 1950, to miss his bus turns out to be nicknamed "Bob Horn" (*P*, 25), in no sense can this be the "same" protagonist as Axel Rex's original from *Kamera obskura:* "*Robert Gorn*" (*LD* R; first ment. on 5). The coincidence is a remarkable one, nevertheless: Bob derives from Robert; and the Cyrillic *G* becomes *H* according to the standard rule of transliteration – an ortographic fact often applied by VN for punning purposes. With fitting symmetry, in Pnin's Russian past there has already figured one "Robert Karlovich Horn" (*P*, 178). His patronymic evokes – as an additional bonus – Hermann (Karlovich) from *Despair*.

(iii) *L* → *Ds*. Another punningly Anglo-Russian correlation: the Russified Humbert Humbert says that among his many aliases he has considered "*German German*" (*L* R, 286), which is fitting, as VN has also drawn attention to the similarities between Humbert and Hermann outside his fiction (Foreword to *Ds*, 9). The same rule of transcription is at work here as in (ii) above.[112]

(iv) *A* → *L*. A related instance is also found in *Ada*, where "Prince Potyomkin, a mixed-up kid from Sebastopol, Id." (182) is treated by the psychiatrist "P.O. Tyomkin" (*ibid*). We recall that in the Russian *Lolita* one of Quilty's mocking guestbook-entries was given as "*P.O. Tjomkin, Odessa, Texas*" (*L* R, 231).

(v) *A* → (*PF* → ["To Prince S.M. Kachurin" → *G*]). One of the maidservants in Van Veen's last floramor turns out to be "Princess Kachurin" (*A*, 357); this harks back to "Prince Andrey Kachurin" in *Pale Fire* (103). In *The Gift*, a "corpulent new romance by General Kachurin" (161) is glimpsed by Fyodor in a Berlin book-store, and the 1947 poem by the author ("To Prince S.M. Kachurin"; *PP*, 135–41) is in its entirety addressed to a similarly named protagonist.[113]

(vi) *A* → (*PF* → ["An Evening of Russian Poetry" → *LD*]). "Gradus", the cognomen chosen by Kinbote for his invented villain in *Pale Fire*, becomes anagrammatically threaded throughout much of the narrative: "d'Argus", "Vinogradus", "Leningradus", etc. (cf. 307 *passim*). The name also correlates with anagrammatic counterparts in other texts by the author. Ada drives a car named "Argus" (*A*, 558). Already in *Kamera obskura* the hero frequented a theater with the same name (*LD* R, 15), and the occurrence was self-consciously commented upon in the English version: " 'Argus' – good name for a cinema" (*LD*, 14). Also the speaker in the 1945 poem maintains:

> [74] My back is Argus-eyed.[114] I live in danger.
> False shadows turn to track me when I pass.
> ("An Evening of Russian Poetry"; *PP*, 160)

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112. In Rainer Werner Fassbinder's German movie version of *Despair* (1978) the hero was actually named "Hermann Hermann". Cf. the review of the film by SKOW 1978, 71.

113. Scholarship – at least my scholarship – has failed to ascertain whether "Kachurin" has any existence outside the Nabokovian universe. In his note appended to the poem VN refers to the addressee as a real-life character: "a former White army colonel" (*PP*, 141). As far as the novels go, however, he is a strictly fictive figure.

114. Is it relevant to notice here that in 1945 VN published an entomological article entitled "A Third Species of *Echinargus* Nabokov"? In 1948 there came another one: "A New Species of *Cyclargus* Nabokov".

(vii) *LH!* → (*A* → *L*). There are other anagrammatic correlations. Van Veen's mother "Marina", we are told, spends her time in Demon's "Villa Marina" (*A*, 15), which is also suggestive of Humbert Humbert's boyhood home at Riviera: "Hotel Mirana" (*L*, 12). Vadim, for his part, glimpses "Mirana Palace" (*LH!*, 30) in the vicinity of Carnavaux, and in the Russian *Lolita* Humbert's home is renamed "*gostinica Mirana Palas*" (*L* R, 2).

(viii) *LH!* → *BS.* Alphabetic games are played with Krug's name on various occasions in *Bend Sinister:* at an early point in the narrative he comes across an Ekwilist soldier named "Gurk" (15), and later on the name is twisted into every possible variant by Paduk (cf. 129, 208). This play spills over, as it were, into *Look at the Harlequins!*, where Vadim chooses "General Gurko" (204) as the hero of his novel "*Esmeralda and Her Parandrus*" (a familiar-sounding text in other respects as well; cf. the discourse on Ophelia in Vadim's novel [162] and the *Hamlet*-colloquy between Krug and Ember in *Bend Sinister* [93–114]).

(ix) *LH!* → *SK.* "Oleg Orlov" (*LH!*, 216), one of Vadim's Paris acquaintances, later a Soviet agent, derives from V's informant in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight:*

> [75] Olga Olegovna Orlova – an egg-like alliteration which it would have been a pity to withhold.
> (5)

(x) *LH!* → *L.* Vadim transfers a "real-life" dentist who treats him at Berlin into his "*A Kingdom by the Sea*": "His name was Molnar with that *n* like a grain in a cavity [. . .]" (*LH!*, 18). In *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert's teeth are to be extracted by another "Dr Molnar" (283), and Lolita is taught at Beardsley by one "Miss Molar" (191).

(xi) *LH!* → (*PF* → [*SK*+*L*]). In his gloss to l. 627 of Shade's poem Kinbote explains that the college-astronomer at Wordsmith – "the great Starover Blue" (*PF*, 236) – derives his name, not from celestial bodies, but from the Russian word *starover* (meaning 'Old Believer'). Unknown to the commentator, however, the name also crosses Sebastian Knight's Russian doctor, "Dr. Starov" (*SK*, 179), with "Dr. Blue" (*L*, 235), who examines Lolita at Elphinstone. In *Look at the Harlequins!* the first name is assigned both to Vadim's patron "Count Starov" (10) and to "*leytenant* Starov" (59), who murders Vadim's first wife.

Migratory Motifs

Apart from fictive names and titles, also other motifs, references to inanimate objects and "props" of every variety, may be used in baring the level of AM behind particular narratives.

(i) *Sobytie* → *IB.* Let it be again noted how the author's 1938 drama *Sobytie* plays with motifs taken from his former novels (on this account cf. also ex. [63] above).

> [76] *Scena snachala pusta. Zatem cherez nejo medlenno katitsja, vojdja sprava, sine-krasnyj detskij mjach.*
> [*The scene is empty at first. Then a blue-red children's ball slowly rolls across it, from left to right.]
> (Act I; 43)

One may assume that the original émigré audience, which knew its Sirin, had no difficulty in connecting ex. [76] with a novel that had been printed only two years before the play. In *Invitation to a Beheading,* Cincinnatus observes the prison-warden's daughter Emmie playing with an identical object (cf. 41), and further on she sets it rolling:

> [77] Just then, silently and not very fast, a red-and-blue ball rolled in through the door.[115] (66)

(ii) *LH!* → (*L* → [SF → ⟨*Ds* → *KQKn*⟩]). Somewhat unexpectedly, *the make of cars* turns out to be a prominently-figuring motif throughout Nabokovian fiction. In the Russian *Lolita* the vehicle driven by Humbert Humbert – "Dream Blue Melmoth" (*L,* 222) – is transformed into " *'grjozovosini[j]' Ikar* [*a 'dream-blue' Icarus]" (*L* R, 208). This is a motivated revision in its own right, highlighting Humbert's artistic aspirations as well as his ultimate downfall ("Icarus"), but the reference also connects with occurrences of similar vehicles in previous works. The car that takes Nina to her death in the English version of "Spring in Fialta" is "a yellow long-bodied Icarus" (*ND,* 23; in SF R this was merely "*staryj grjaznyj limuzin*" [*SF,* 29]). In *Despair* – but not in *Otchajanie* (cf. *Ds* R, 32, 158, 165) – Hermann similarly drives a "shiny blue Icarus" (42, 175, 182).[116] "*Ikar*"/"Icarus" had made an initial appearance in *King, Queen, Knave* (42; *KQKn* R, 44), and the whole auto-allusive series is recalled in *Look at the Harlequins!,* when Vadim and Iris receive a "really quite nice blue Icarus" (49) as a wedding present.

(iii) *A* → *L*. Another Nabokovian vehicle, a "large black Yak" (*A,* 528, 558) is noticed by Van Veen at the start of his seventeen-year separation from Ada. In *Lolita,* Humbert Humbert is pursued by Quilty in a "Red Yak" (212).

Other Shared Elements

Our final category contains all remaining cases of auto-allusion in VN's fiction. There may be embedded quotations from earlier texts (below [vi]–[vii]); incorporated plot-synopses ([viii]–[xii]); or other significantly recurring elements (figures in [i]–[ii], fictive locales in [iii], fictive titles and terms in [iv]–[v] and [xiii]). Such a listing could no doubt be expanded with no end, for if one looks closely enough, virtually any element in a group of texts keeps "recurring". (One may be reminded here of the Ekwilist claim in *Bend Sinister* that "all men consist of the same [. . .] letters variously mixed" [60]. Whatever the pertinence of this doctrine to human individuals, it most obviously applies to literary texts.)

However, even though an absolutely strict border-line between simple repetition (of letters, motifs, tropes) and actual "alluding" may be difficult to draw, one still feels that certain recurrent elements in our corpus are sufficiently specific to be listed here. One case in point was already seen in the exchange of "fatidic" dates between diverse

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115. Fyodor's first collection of poems in *The Gift* also opens with a piece entitled "The Lost Ball" (17), but the object is not specified in more detail.

116. GRAYSON (1977, 66) says that a reference to "Icarus" already figured in VN's 1937 English version of the novel. I have not been able to examine this edition, but if Grayson's assertion is valid we are correct in regarding *Despair* as the source-text for "Spring in Fialta" (published in English ten years later, in 1947).

Nabokovian fictions (cf. above 6.2.2. for a full tabulation). I suggest that at least the following instances should be taken into account.

(i) *PF* → (*P* → *L*). The figure "999" turns out to be another concrete link between these consecutively published novels (cf. above exs. [71] and [72]). This is of course the number of lines in Shade's "Pale Fire", and in his shorter poem "*The Nature of Electricity*" Shade writes:

> [78] Streetlamps are numbered, and maybe
> Number nine-hundred-ninety-nine
> [. . .] is an old friend of mine.
> (*PF,* 192)

Pnin's last address at Waindell (before he himself migrates, as it were, into the world of *Pale Fire*) is given as "nine hundred ninety nine, Todd Road" (*P,* 151), and the ultimate source occurs in *Lolita* when Lolita slyly diverts Humbert Humbert's attention with a reference to the odometer:

> [79] Oh, look, all the nines are changing into the next thousand.
> (214)

(ii) *A* → (*The Waltz Invention* → *L*). Similarly "1001", the fairy-tale figure, ties together three texts. In *Ada,* it is told that Marina never visited the Ardis library on the account that she had "her own set of a Thousand-and-One Best Plays in her boudoir" (41); after Eric van Veen's demise a "thousand and one memorial floramors" are erected in his memory (349). In the English revision of the drama *The Waltz Invention* (1966) the hero claims to have invented an infernal machine that will bring doom "over a thousand and one dark seas" (12; the figure is missing from the 1938 text of *Izobretenie Val'sa:* "[. . .] *na ljubom razstojanii, – za okeanom, vsjudu*" [Act I; 7]). As for *Lolita,* here Humbert and Lolita have breakfast "in the township of Soda, population 1,001" (215).

(iii) TD → (*Gl* → "Ul'daborg"). Fictive locales may recur from one text to another. The chronicler in "Tyrants Destroyed" explains the success of totalitarianism in his home land with a reference to "the implacable evolution of dark, zoological, Zoorlandic ideas" (*TD,* 6). This recapitulates Martin's and Sonia's fantasies of "Zoorland" in *Glory* (147 *passim;* from the bibliographic entry in FIELD [1973, 79] we see that an excerpt from the novel was in fact separately printed in 1931 under the title "*Zoorlandija*"). Either reference harks back to the 1930 poem "*Ul'daborg*", which appeared with the notation: "*perevod s zoorlandskogo* [*a translation from Zoorlandian]" (*Stikhi* 1979, 235).[117]

(iv) AssP → Lik. Imaginary titles may be transferred from one fictive context to another. In "The Assistant Producer" we find that a street in Paris has been named "by some well-read city father" after a "philosopher called Pierre Labime" (*ND,* 69–70). No such philosopher exists, and the official would have to be well-read indeed, as the name appears to derive from "Lik", which opens with a description of "*L'Abîme*" (*TD,* 71), a fictive play.

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117. Quite similarly Kinbote's "Zembla" in *Pale Fire* is already mentioned by the speaker in the 1942 poem "The Refridgerator Awakes": "Nova Zembla [. . .] with that B in her bonnet" (*PP,* 153).

(v) *A* → *IB.* The title of the novel examined by Cincinnatus in his cell – "*Quercus*" (*IB,* 122), the history of an oak tree – recurs under the guise of a "scientific" name for the tree growing at Ardis: "*Quercus ruslan* Châ̂t" (*A,* 398).[118]

(vi) *LH!* → *BS.* Former novels may be quoted within the bounds of new ones.[119] The Red Army soldier trying to stop Vadim from leaving Russia – "And whither [. . .] may you be rolling (*kotishsya*), little apple (*yablochko*)?" (*LH!,* 10) – unwittingly duplicates the scene between Krug and the Ekwilist forces:

> [80] Krug was caught by a friendly soldier.
> '*Yablochko, kuda-zh ty tak kotishsa* [little apple, whither are you rolling]?' asked the soldier.
> (*BS,* 201; square brackets in the text)

(vii) *LH!* → *IB.* The title of Vadim's "*The Red Top Hat*" (originally entitled "*Krasnyy Tsilindr*" [*LH!,* 80]) evokes the judge's pronouncement to Cincinnatus from the opening chapter of *Invitation to a Beheading:*

> [81] [. . .] with the gracious consent of the audience, you will be made to don the red tophat [. . .]
> (21; cf. *IB* R: "[. . .] *nadenut' krasnyj cilindr* [. . .]" [17])

Elsewhere, Vadim's novel is described as "the story of a beheading" (*LH!,* 80); its protagonist is introduced as "Big Peter" (144), which harks back to M'sieur Pierre; and "graceful little Amy" (78) is named as one of its secondary characters – the link to the prison-warden's daughter "Emmie" from *Invitation to a Beheading* is an obvious one.

(viii) *L* → *G.* Plot-synopses of the author's previous novels may function as small narrative elements in other parts of the opus. Shchyogolev, describing in *The Gift* his own thwarted attempts to seduce his stepdaughter (cf. 179), unknowingly anticipates the novelistic scheme later elaborated throughout the first half of *Lolita.* His claim that he is talking of events taking place "*v nekotorom carstve*" [*in a certain kingdom]" (*G* R, 210; cf. *G:* "in fairyland" [179] is given an apt equivalent in the Russian *Lolita* when Humbert Humbert paraphrases Poe in Russian: "*V nekotorom knjazhestve u morja*" (*L* R; 1; *L:* "[. . .] in a princedom by the sea" [11]).

(ix) *PF* → *P.* Motifs from Victor Wind's and Pnin's "twinned" dreams in *Pnin* – the king's refusal to abdicate, his confinement in the royal palace, the escape by a motorboat (84–6, 109–10) – provide a precise synopsis of Kinbote's subsequent Zembla-epic in *Pale Fire* (esp. his note to l. 130; cf. 118–21, 145–7). That a whole network of correlations ties together these two novels has been noted above (exs. [72], [78]). VN himself once coyly talked of "telepathy" experienced between protagonists inhabiting the worlds of his separate narratives (*SO,* 84).

(x) *LH!* → (*KQKn* + *Df*). Vadim's second novel "*Pawn Takes Queen*" typically con-

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118. There are additional allusive elements here: "*ruslan*" suggests Pushkin (*Ruslan and Ljudmila*) and "Châ̂t" may be read, among other things, as a truncated Chateaubriand. Both writers are frequently evoked throughout *Ada.* For these allusions cf. LUBIN 1970, 204; PROFFER 1974b, 271.

119. This is a device corresponding quite literally to the notion of "*avtocitat*" used by Slavic literary theorists. Cf. above n. 102.

taminates plot synopses of at least two former novels by the author.[120] Compare:

> [82] The lady next to me informed me she had adored [*KQKn*] that treacherous conversation between the Pawn and the Queen about the husband [*Df*] and would they really defenestrate the poor chess player?
> (*LH!*, 58)

It is no wonder, taken such multiplications, that Vadim quite explicitly mentions his fear that as a novelist "[he] might be permanently impersonating somebody" (96).

(xi) *A* → *L*. In *Ada,* one of the Antiterran bestsellers for 1892 – "*The Gitanilla*" (371, 383, 459 *passim*) – clearly harks back to *Lolita,* but its plot-line seems to be derived *via* Quilty's playlet "*The Enchanted Hunters*" (paraphrased in *L* on 196). After her breakdown mad Aqua is prescribed certain "plump purple pills": these remind her of –

> [83] [. . .] those with which the little gypsy enchantress in the Spanish tale (dear to Ladore schoolgirls) puts to sleep all the sportsmen and all their bloodhounds at the opening of the hunting season.
> (*A*, 27–8)

The tale turns out to be "*The Gitanilla*". It recalls Quilty's play as well as Humbert Humbert's own experiments with sleeping pills in the Enchanted Hunters hotel (cf. his remarks on "Purpills" on 121). Even the bare title of the Antiterran bestseller connects with certain plot-elements in *Lolita* (i.e. Humbert's habit of comparing Lolita to a "gypsy" [40, 61–2, 233, 237, 271, 273]). As Humbert writes at one point:

> [84] 'Incidentally, I want all my clothes', said the gitanilla [. . .][121]
> (*L*, 238)

(xii) *LH!* → *L*. In *Look at the Harlequins!*, still more extensive play is based on cross-connections between Vadim's narrative and VN's best-known novel. Vadim himself suggests that by writing his hugely popular "*A Kingdom by the Sea*" he in effect "became his own American uncle [*amerikanskiy dyadyushka, oncle d'Amérique*]" (*LH!*, 129–30; square brackets in the text) – which immediately duplicates the original source: in *Lolita* Humbert Humbert's emigration to USA is made possible because of an inheritance from his "*oncle d'Amérique*" (28). The title of Vadim's novel recapitulates the underlying "Annabel Lee" subtext in *Lolita* ("a princedom by the sea" [*L*, 11]), and its plot-line (paraphrased in *LH!* on 215–16, 218) resembles a suspiciously *Lolita*-like history.

The latter is true, moreover, of the main plot-line in Vadim's own life: his "first

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120. A third allusion may be hidden inside the fictive title, recalling as it does Humbert's chess game with Gaston Godin in *Lolita:* the latter is depicted as "dying to take that juicy queen and not daring" (199).

121. It is said, moreover, that *The Gitanilla* was written by a novelist called "Osberg" (*A*, 77, 344, 361 *passim*); it vies for a place on the bestseller lists with a work entitled "*Mertvago Forever*" (371, 383, 459); and another of its competitors carries the title "*Clichy Clichés*" (344, 383). These are all expressions of VN's personal literary feuds. "Osberg" equals Borges (on whom cf. *SO*, 289). Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (*SO*, 205–7) competed with the American edition of *Lolita* for the status of the most sold novel until the end of the 1950's. The third title alludes to still another competitor: *Quiet Days in Clichy* (1956) by Henry Miller, whom Van Veen at another point lampoons as "Heinrich Müller" (*A*, 136; cf. also "Notes to *Ada*": "author of Poxus, etc." [*A* 1970, 467]).

sweet love, a child in an orchard" (*LH!*, 7, 46) recalls Humbert Humbert's early tryst with Annabel (*L*, 16–17); his affair with a subsequent mistress – Dolly von Borg (*LH!*, 136–46 *passim*) – duplicates numerous details from the Lolita-history itself (at one point Vadim even signs a guest book with "the dumbest address [he] could produce at the moment, Dumbert Dumbert, Dumberton" [*LH!*, 143; cf. also 203]);[122] and later this will happen again when it comes to the relationship between Vadim and his daughter "Bel" (on 184 she is called "Annabel" and on 170 the name is garbled into "Isabel Lee"). It is with Bel that Vadim conducts his journey from one motel to another (*LH!*, 156–7, 170–2; *L*, 143–5, 205–6 *passim*); his interview with Bel's head-mistress reproduces the one between Humbert and Miss Pratt at Beardsley (*LH!*, 174; *L*, 189–93); and his ultimate loss of Bel after he has married Louise once more harks back to Lolita's and her mother's rivalry in the early sections of *Lolita* (cf. Vadim's comment on "the hideous banality of a stepmother-versus-stepdaughter situation" [*LH!*, 189]). Bel's birthday ("January 1") coincides with that of Lolita (for "fatidic dates" cf. above 6.2.2.), and as a teenager she even dates a boy whose father is employed in "the Quilton Hotel" (*LH!*, 226) – echoes of the phonetic clue-game played with Quilty's guestbook entries in *Lolita* (243–5 *passim*).

(xiii) *LH!* → (*A* → [*PF* → *L*]). The term "nymphet", finally, represents a well-known Nabokovian coinage, first introduced in Humbert Humbert's discourse to designate the objects of his passion (*L*, 18). The term is reapplied as a peculiarly AM-baring device in *Pale Fire* ("A nymphet pirouetted" [202; also on 296]); *Ada* (111, 140, 218, 229, 392); and *Look at the Harlequins!*, where Vadim recalls a child once observed on the Riviera *plage:*

> [85] She was what in a later era amateurs were to call a 'nymphet'.
> (29; also on 36, 173, 180)

Compare in addition the repeated occurrences of "faunlet", another Nabokovian neologism: "I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right" (*L*, 19–20, 166); "He was a regular faunlet" (*PF*, 123); "[. . .] a green-eyed frail faunlet" (*A*, 355).[123]

Summary

"No biographer will ever catch a glimpse of my private life" (*Lectures 2*, 138), asserted the author in the margin of his lecture on Tolstoj. In one sense, he has been putting forward the same argument all through his public career as a novelist. The figure of a burlesque biographer first made its appearance as early as in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, where both V and his rival Mr. Goodman are observed making efforts to uncover the "real" (i.e. private) life of their subject. *Pale Fire* records Kinbote's comical quest for the private backgrounds of Shade's poem. A related pattern is contained in *Pnin*,

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122. This reproduces Humbert Humbert's fumbles with the Enchanted Hunters guestbook (*L*, 117). In addition, Dolly recalls how Vadim "used to mesmerize her in [his] lap, playing sweet Uncle Gasper, muffing every other line" (*LH!*, 137), which correlates with the sofa-scene in *Lolita* (57–62) as well as with one of Humbert's alternative pseudonyms: "Mesmer Mesmer" (300).

123. Cf. VN's complaint in his letter of 1967: "Mr. Desmond MacNamara, writing on a New Zealand novel, thinks that there should be coined a male equivalent of 'nymphet' in the sense I gave it. He is welcome to my 'faunlet' first mentioned in 1955 (*Lolita*, Chapter 5). How time flies! How attention flags! " (*SO*, 216).

and also *Transparent Things* includes satiric digs at one Mr. Tamworth, Mr. R's former secretary, who is here said to have "boswell[ed] the dead man just as he had bossed very well the living one" (83). Still in his last published novel, VN introduced a variant of the biographer-motif: the Freudian-minded "Hamlet Goodman" (*LH!*, 121, 172, 226), whose efforts again hark back to the figure of Goodman in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Vadim's own attack on "[the] matter-of-fact, father-of-muck, mucking biograffitist" (*LH!*, 226) or his contention that –

> [86] [while] bad readers are by nature aware of the author's origins [. . .] good readers will be more interested in his books than in his stemma.
> (111)

– might well serve as summary-phrases for a campaign that informed almost half a century of novelistic writing.

In the foregoing survey we have investigated those methods through which this particular concern may be actualized as an element of narrative structure. It was seen that materials connected with the Nabokovian *persona* are evoked as a matter of course in VN's fiction. On the other hand, while the notion of "author" is in this way introduced into the world of particular narratives, it is at the same time indicated that nothing can be inferred on the basis of such references about the biography of the "real" author. All our information concerning the specific authorial codes, the author's background, opinions, or hobbies, comes to us *via* his other texts, and – as was observed with regard to his auto-allusive strategies – in the end this information can have bearing only on his status *as the author of literary texts*. This is why neither Goodman nor V will ever discover the true version of the subject's life in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Kinbote may succeed in writing a splendid narrative on the basis of Shade's poem in *Pale Fire*, but he will not be able to tell the ultimate truth about its maker. Vadim can never get to know his creator in *Look at the Harlequins!*, despite his disturbing suspicion that he himself is but "a parody [. . .] [a] non-identical twin" of another man (89; above ex. [3]). And neither can the reader of Nabokovian fiction ever truly "know" its maker, for every element in it spirals back to the underlying "*ex libris* design" (another of Vadim's phrases from *LH!*, 85) – back to AM and other textual constructs created by the author.

The point has now been reached where these findings may be summed up in a schematic form. The following Table (*Table 3*) is included to suggest the scope and frequency of auto-allusive devices in VN's fiction. It omits verse and drama, which would require a separate listing of their own (some random instances were noted in the above survey; cf. exs. [63]–[64], [74], [76]–[77].)

One should realize, of course, that the given figures indicate general trends rather than exact numerical values. I do not wish to claim that "all" intertextual correlations within VN's – or any other author's – output could be precisely enumerated. It is an inevitable fact, for one thing, that such hidden linkages will be detected in a different ratio when reading different texts, and therefore the figures are not readily comparable. Secondly, we have already noticed that an absolutely strict borderline between "allusion" and mere "repetition" may be hard to draw. (Are the occurrences of "999" in *Pale Fire* [78] or *Lolita* [79] used as actual "allusions" to *Pnin*? What about the "*Yablochko*"-references in *Look at the Harlequins!* and *Bend Sinister* [80]? I am not certain if there are any precise grounds on which this can be decided.) Nonetheless, certain tendencies

inside the opus seem quite indubitable, and one feels that there is some value in making them explicit here.

The texts are alphabetically listed for easy reference, but diachronic criteria are observed in distinguishing the source-text from the alluding text. (This is why e.g. *Lolita* can act in both functions in relation to *Pnin;* I have discussed the background reasons for such cases above.) One may easily see that there is a steady increase in the number of allusions towards the latter part of the author's career. The technique was applied by VN at least as early as in *The Defense,* but it gained the status of a major device from *Pnin* and *Pale Fire* onwards. Taken together, these instances constitute one of the central strategies in all Nabokovian narration.

Table 3

Auto-Allusion in VN's Fiction

Source text / Alluding text	*A*	*BS*	*Df*	*Ds*	*E*	*G*	*Gl*	*IB*	*KQKn*	*L*	*LD*	*M*	*P*	*PF*	*SK*	*TT*	Lik	Ln	MCh	Mus	Rc	RCh	SF	SLDM	SR	SS	UT	VnS
A						2		2	1	11	2		1	9									1					1
BS					1																							
Df												1							1							1		
Ds									1			1											1					
G			1	1			1	1			1	2																
KQKn										1																		
L				2		1			1				1										1				1	
LD						1			1																			
LH!	14	5	2	1	1	3	2	5	2	28	1	1	7	9	8	1					1	1	1	1	1	1		1
P			1	1		1				1	3							1		1					1			
PF						1			1	4	1		6		1										1			
TT	1								1	1																		
AssP																	1											
Aur				1		1						1																
CCL								1																				
Ln			1																	1								
SF									1																			
TD							1																					
TS			1																									

APPENDIX 1
ABBREVIATIONS OF TITLES

Novels

Russian		English	
		A	*Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*
		A 1970	———— (Penguin edition, first issued in 1970)
		BS	*Bend Sinister*
Df R	*Zashchita Luzhina*	*Df*	*The Defense*
Ds R	*Otchajanie*	*Ds*	*Despair*
E R	*Sogljadataj*	*E*	*The Eye*
G R	*Dar*	*G*	*The Gift*
Gl R	*Podvig*	*Gl*	*Glory*
IB R	*Priglashenie na kazn'*	*IB*	*Invitation to a Beheading*
KQKn R	*Korol', dama, valet*	*KQKn*	*King, Queen, Knave*
L R	*Lolita*	*L*	*Lolita* *
		L 1958	———— (Putnam edition, issued in 1958)
LD R	*Kamera obskura*	*LD*	*Laughter in the Dark*
		LH!	*Look at the Harlequins!*
M R	*Mashen'ka*	*M*	*Mary*
		P	*Pnin*
		PF	*Pale Fire*
		SK	*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*
		TT	*Transparent Things*

Short Stories

Russian		English	
AffH R	"*Podlec*"	AffH	"An Affair of Honor"
		Al	" 'That in Aleppo Once ...'"
ASp R	"*Admiraltejskaja igla*"	ASp	"The Admiralty Spire"
		AssP	"The Assistant Producer"
Aur R	"*Pil'gram*"	Aur	"The Aurelian"
BD R	"*Obida*"	BD	"A Bad Day"
BM R	"*Zanjatoj chelovek*"	BM	"A Busy Man"
Bm R	"*Bakhman*"	Bm	"Bachmann"
BN R	"*Opoveshchenie*"	BN	"Breaking the News"
CCL R	"*Oblako, ozero, bashnja*"	CCL	"Cloud, Castle, Lake"

**L* S *Lolita: A Screenplay* (the author's dramatized version of *Lolita*).

Ch R	"*Rozhdestvo*"	Ch	"Christmas"
		CP	"Conversation Piece, 1945"
Cr R	"*Krug*"	Cr	"The Circle"
Db R	"*Zvonok*"	Db	"The Doorbell"
DF R	"*Khvat*"	DF	"A Dashing Fellow"
DS R	"*Katastrofa*"	DS	"Details of a Sunset"
		FL	"First Love"
		FP	"A Forgotten Poet"
GB R	"*Putevoditel' po Berlinu*"	GB	"A Guide to Berlin"
Leon R	"*Korolek*"	Leon	"The Leonardo"
Lik R	"*Lik*"	Lik	"Lik"
Lips R	"*Usta k ustam*"	Lips	"Lips to Lips"
		Ln	"Lance"
LR R	"*Pis'mo v Rossiju*"	LR	"A Letter That Never Reached Russia"
MCh R	"*Sluchajnost'*"	MCh	"A Matter of Chance"
MLISh R	"*Pamjati L.I. Shigaeva*"	MLISh	"In Memory of L.I. Shigaev"
		MO	"Mademoiselle O" **
Mus R	"*Muzyka*"	Mus	"Music"
NT R	"*Skazka*"	NT	"A Nursery Tale"
Or R	"*Lebeda*"	Or	"Orache"
Pass R	"*Passazhir*"	Pass	"The Passenger"
PE R	"*Kartofel'nyj El'f*"	PE	"The Potato Elf"
Perf R	"*Sovershenstvo*"	Perf	"Perfection"
RB R	"*Krasavica*"	RB	"A Russian Beauty"
Rc R	"*Nabor*"	Rc	"Recruiting"
RCh R	"*Vozvrashchenie Chorba*"	RCh	"The Return of Chorb"
Reun R	"*Vstrecha*"	Reun	"The Reunion"
SF R	"*Vesna v Fial'te*"	SF	"Spring in Fialta"
SL R	"*Sluchaj iz zhizni*"	SL	"A Slice of Life"
		SLDM	"Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster"
SR R	"Solus rex"	SR	"*Solus Rex*"
		SS	"Signs and Symbols"
TD R	"*Iztreblenie tiranov*"	TD	"Tyrants Destroyed"
		TE	"Time and Ebb"
Terr R	"*Uzhas*"	Terr	"Terror"
Th R	"*Groza*"	Th	"The Thunderstorm"
TI R	"Terra incognita"	TI	"*Terra Incognita*"
TS R	"*Tjazhelyj dym*"	TS	"Torpid Smoke"
UT R	"Ultima Thule"	UT	"*Ultima Thule*"
VM R	"*Poseshchenie muzeja*"	VM	"The Visit to the Museum"
		VnS	"The Vane Sisters"
VSh R	"*Vasilij Shishkov*"	VSh	"Vasiliy Shishkov"

Collections of Short Stories

Russian	English	
	DS	*Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*
	ND	*Nabokov's Dozen*
	NQ	*Nabokov's Quartet*
	NS	*Nine Stories*
	RB	*A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*

**MO F The author's own French version of "Mademoiselle O".

Sogl	*Sogljadataj*		
		TD	*Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*
VCh	*Vozvrashchenie Chorba: Rasskazy i stikhi*		
VF	*Vesna v Fial'te i drugie rasskazy*		

Collections of Poetry

Russian		English	
GP	*Gornyj put'*		
Gr	*Grozd'*		
		PP	*Poems and Problems*
Stikhi 1916	*Stikhi* (privately printed, issued in St. Petersburg)		
Stikhi 1979	*Stikhi* (selected Russian poems, issued in Ann Arbor, Mich.)		

Memoirs

Russian		English	
SM R	*Drugie berega*	*SM*	*Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*
		SM 1951	*Conclusive Evidence: A Memoir* ***

Interviews, Essays, Letters

Russian		English	
Interview 1930	"*Anketa o Pruste*"		
Interview 1932	"*U V.V. Sirina*"		
		Interview 1971	"Understanding Vladimir Nabokov – A Red Autumn Leaf Is A Red Autumn Leaf, Not A Deflowered Nymphet"
		Interview 1975	"Checking in with Vladimir Nabokov"
		Interview 1977	"The Last Interview"
		Letter 1965	"The Strange Case of Nabokov and Wilson"
		Letter 1966a	"Translation"
		Letter 1966b	"Nabokov's Onegin"
		Letter 1971	"Nabokov vs. Wilson"
		Letter 1972	"Nabokov vs. Wilson (Concluded)"
		Letters	*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters: Correspondence between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson 1940–1971*

***Or *Speak, Memory: A Memoir* (British edition). These two editions share the pagination.

Note 1959	[Note on "The Vane Sisters"]
Postscript 1964	[Postscript to ARNDT 1964]
SO	*Strong Opinions*

Lectures, Criticism, Translations

EO (1–4)	*Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin.* In Four Volumes. (Revised edition, issued in 1975)
EO 1964	———————— (The first Bollingen edition, issued in 1964)
HOT	*A Hero of Our Time: A Novel by Mikhail Lermontov*
IC	*The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the Twelfth Century*
Lectures 1	*Lectures on Literature*
Lectures 2	*Lectures on Russian Literature*
Lectures 3	*Lectures on Don Quixote*
NG	*Nikolai Gogol*

APPENDIX 2
ABBREVIATIONS OF NARRATOLOGICAL TERMS

AI	narrator's awareness of the artistic import in his discourse
AM	author's metatext
C	character
CD	character's discourse
IA	implied author
IR	implied reader
N	narrator
N'	narrator within an embedded narrative level
N_A	autobiographic narrator
N_B	biographic narrator
N_E	extrinsic narrator
N_I	intrinsic narrator
ND	narrator's discourse
Ne	narratee
Ne'	narratee of an embedded narrative
NI	narrative irony
Nm	naming of narrator
NS	narrative situation
NW	narrated world
S	*skaz*
SA	narrator's awareness of the scribal act
SR	narratorial self-reference
SR_C	covert self-reference
SR_O	overt self-reference

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